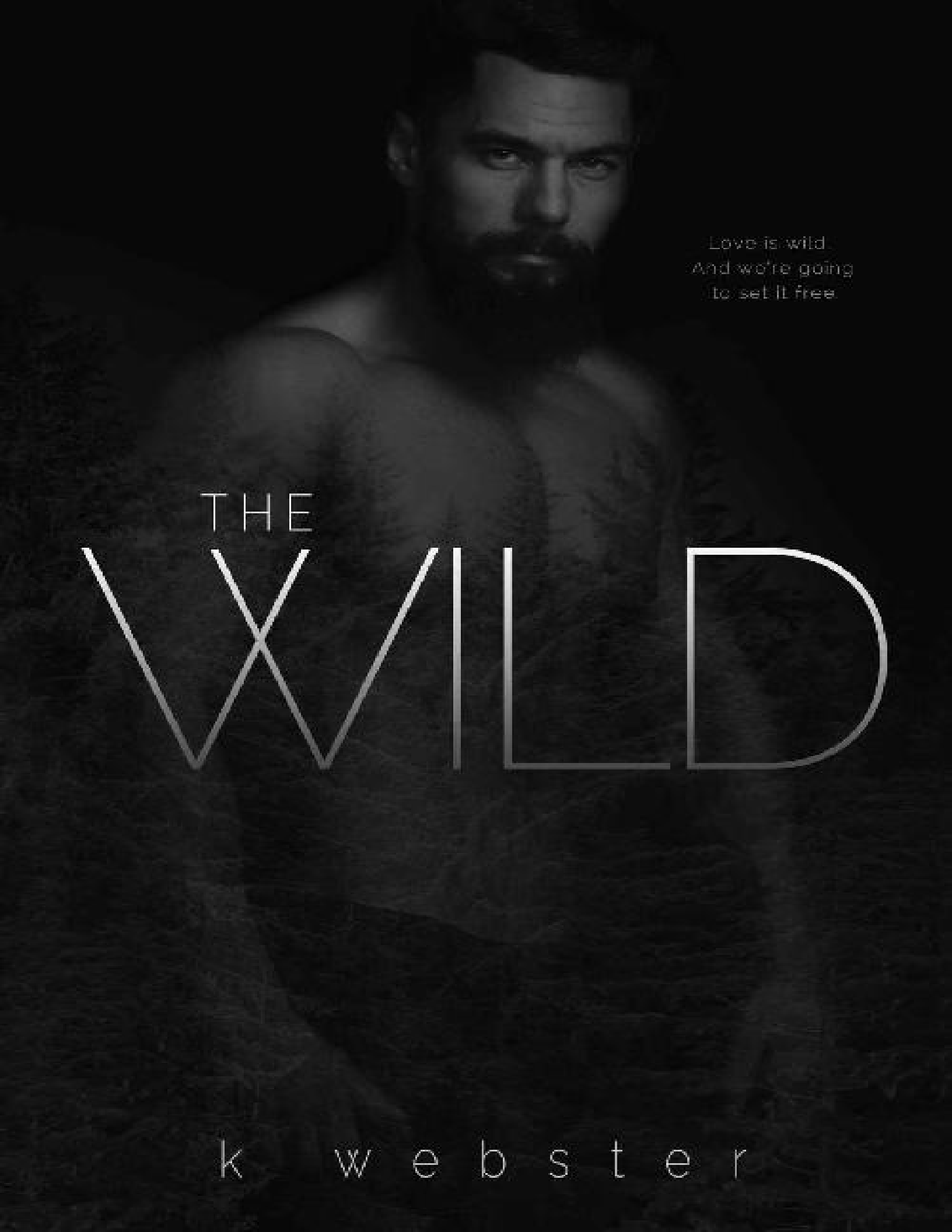
Love is wild.
And we're going
to set it free.
THE
WILD
k webster

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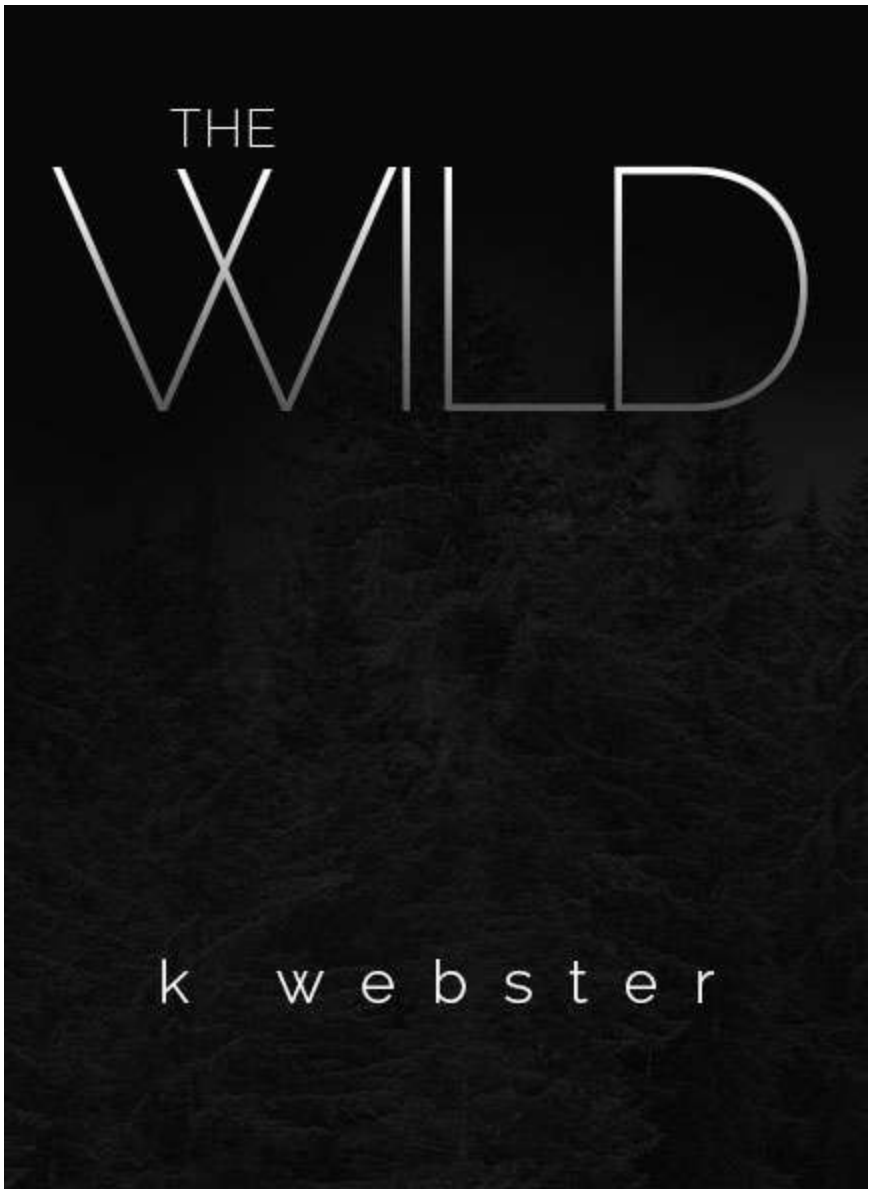

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The Wild

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DEDICATION

To my husband…I believe in happy endings because of you.

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“She had a wild, wandering soul
but when she loved, she loved with chaos and that made all the difference.”
—Ariana Dancu

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Warning:

The Wild **is an extremely taboo story. Most will find that the themes in this book will make you incredibly uncomfortable or maybe even offend you. This book is only for the brave, the open-minded, and the ones who crave love in even the most dismal of situations. Extreme sexual themes and violence in certain scenes, which could trigger emotional distress, are found in this story. If you are sensitive to heavy taboo themes, then this story is not for you.**

Seriously, you've been warned.
Don't say I didn't try.
You're probably going to cringe many, many, many times.
Even if you're on the fence, it's probably not a good idea to proceed.

However, if you're intrigued and fearless and *kind of sort of* trust me, then carry on. This book *is* for you.

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PROLOGUE

reed

Past

Losing a child is inconceivable.

Anyone with a child always has that worry playing continuously in the back of their mind. Each time they're at the water park. Every time they buckle their kiddo into a car seat. All those times they send their little ones off to spend the night with a friend.

Every second.

Every day.

Without fail.

That fear lingers in the shadows of your mind like a monster just waiting to come out and devour everything you hold precious.

Most of us don't have to deal with such atrocities.

The rest of us get to know firsthand what it's like to watch them lower your heart into the earth. Too soon. Too fucking soon. We get to watch our spouse collapse in on themselves and choose darkness over the rest of the family members who are still here. All of us who do lose a child get to know how it feels to have every memory ripped from your chest and scattered into the wind. There will be no new memories—all you have left are the ones that quickly slip from your grip.

"Daddy?"

Her voice, so much like her twin brother, both soothes and crushes me. My wife and I lost our son. But Devon lost her brother. The other half of her soul. A human she shared the womb with. Those two worked as two halves of a whole. Always anticipating the other's emotions and aiding

them when they needed it. Siblings who, even at ten years old, didn't fight in our home.

They laughed.

They sang.

They played.

They loved.

"Daddy?"

I pinch the bridge of my nose and long for more of the whiskey but it's gone. Downed the entire fifth tonight. Nothing can numb the pain that sears through me though. Fucking nothing.

"Yeah, Pip?"

When she was a toddler, she used to seem to squeak compared to her loud, wild brother. I'd called him Rowdy because he was rambunctious as hell and her Pip for pipsqueak.

Another throbbing ache in my chest.

"I miss Drew." Her tone is sad. Nothing but a whisper.

I lean back in my office chair and regard my daughter. The only child I have left. For ten, she's tall and lanky. Her wide blue eyes are innocent and full of soul. Lately they flicker with worry. Both of her parents have fallen off the deep end.

"I do too, baby." I pat my lap and she runs over to me like she would when she was small. When I pull her into an embrace, I inhale her hair. Same shampoo Drew used. An obnoxious, ugly sob rips from my throat. "I-I'm s-so sorry," I choke out, my hot tears falling relentlessly down my cheeks.

She sniffles and I hold her tighter. The counselor says we need to be strong for our remaining child. Sabrina can't get her goddamned ass out of bed. It's up to me to pick our family up and glue it back together.

Sometimes I wonder if we're too broken.

Unfixable.

Lost.

"Did Mommy love Drew more? Is that why she's so sad and won't talk to me?" Devon's voice cracks with emotion. She's heartbroken for so many reasons. Losing her brother and mother essentially at the same exact moment has to be hard on her. It's devastating to me and I'm a grown-ass man.

“Of course she loves you just as much,” I say fiercely. I stroke her satin blonde hair. “We just need to give her time. She’s sad. We’re all sad. Each of us will grieve in our own ways.”

“Promise you’ll always talk to me, Daddy,” she begs tearfully. “Even when you’re so sad or angry. Don’t leave me alone.”

More tears roll out of my eyes and soak her hair. I cry so hard that I can’t formulate words. All I can do is nod. Kiss her head and nod. She holds out her pinky and I hook mine with hers.

A pinky promise is what she calls this.

I vow to talk to her and love her even during the darkest of times. Although, I’m not really sure how life can get any darker than this.

You could lose your other child, the dark, menacing monster in my head growls.

I squeeze her tighter.

Nod.

Kiss.

Nod again.

“I promise.” My words are a faint whisper but she hears. She always hears.

“I love you, Daddy.”

Nod.

Kiss.

Nod again.

“I love you too, Pip.”

I’ll be goddamned if I let anything happen to this kid too.

That’s a promise I make to the ugly monster inside of me and force him back into the shadows where he belongs.

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CHAPTER ONE

reed

Present

Sabrina stares out the window, her features hard behind her oversized sunglasses and too much makeup. I squeeze her hand but she doesn't squeeze back. Six years after Drew's death and my wife has yet to snap out of it. Depression is her middle name. Losing Drew was the final straw after years and years of tragedies that plagued our family. There was no coming back after that. She was lost. For me, losing Drew, was the most crushing of all the heartaches in my life. It was real. Tangible. Horrifying. And yet I couldn't abandon our other child. She was still alive and very desperate for love.

Devon and I had to keep on living while Sabrina got to live in the past. With him. Obsessed over the memories they shared. Suspended in a time that doesn't exist anymore.

This move is my last-ditch effort to bring her back to us.

A Hail Mary.

My last hope for a miracle.

"According to data compiled by the Wildlife Land and Water Coalition, people are forty-five times more likely to be killed by a dog than by a bear, one hundred and twenty times more likely to be killed by bees than a bear, and an incredible two hundred and fifty times more likely to be killed by lightning than a bear," Devon chirps from behind me, her long skinny leg stretched out to nudge me in the arm to get my attention.

Our eyes meet in the mirror and I laugh. This girl and her useless facts. "Too bad we stocked up on bear spray then, huh?" I tease.

Her eyes are hidden behind her sunglasses that are similar to her mother's but her smile is wide and carefree. At sixteen, she's brilliant and full of life. "How many bears you think we'll see, Dad? One a month? Two a month? One a week?"

Sabrina tenses from her seat. She was cool with every part of this move. The bears have her scared shitless though. I vowed I wouldn't let her get killed by a bear.

"A buddy of mine who did a sabbatical in the Alaskan wilderness said he saw several a day. They're plentiful in these parts." I grin at her in the mirror. "But that's why God made guns."

"Dad!" Devon complains. "Don't shoot any bears."

I shrug. "Not a promise I can make, Pip. If it comes between a bear living to catch another fish tomorrow or my baby girl remaining unharmed, you better believe I'm going to kill that bear."

At this, Sabrina snorts. "Okay, Davey Crockett."

Devon giggles from the back and passes her mother a brochure she picked up at the last gas station before we began the hard leg of our journey. "Look at the map, Mom. Bear Country is what they call it. Five bucks says Dad tries to carpet the house with bearskin rugs."

Sabrina takes the brochure and stares at it. Her lips are pressed into a firm line. I'm sure she's coming to terms with reality right about now. In another six hours or so, we'll be right in the middle of our property. I liquidated every dime of my multimillion dollar global real estate company and purchased thousands of acres deep in the Alaskan wilderness.

After a humiliating episode between my wife and a woman at one of California's most elite country clubs we were a member of, I knew we had to do something drastic. Sabrina had taken to slapping a woman because she didn't like how the woman was talking to her son. It was the meltdown of the century. Screaming. Crying. Cursing. Sabrina had to be escorted off the property and we were banned from the club for life. To make matters worse, with social media being a bitch, her psychotic rage was filmed by dozens of others at the club. It spread through the internet like a goddamned forest fire, burning our family's hard-earned reputation in its wake.

I moved fast.

Instead of watching developers and buyers walk away from Jamison Enterprises, I began liquidating and selling. It took nearly a year, and that long to plan, but we're finally ready to move on with our lives.

Just the three of us.

Off the grid.

Like those crazy bush people, as Devon likes to tease.

When I mentioned it to my wife and daughter, I'd expected resistance. I should have known Devon would be on board first. We spoke with her teachers at her all-girls private school and they let her double up her studies so she could graduate from high school early. My daughter, brilliant as the sun's rays, crushed her sophomore year which ultimately also became her senior year.

Sabrina was a little harder to convince. She couldn't see my vision. Despite the blueprints I'd drawn up of a cozy log cabin and ideas for collecting water and planting crops, she was confused. Her life was our million-dollar home in San Francisco. Her life was nothing but pictures and things that belonged to our son.

But I did convince her.

Told her she could bring those memories with her.

That Drew would have loved the wilderness. Our son was adventure on top of adventure. A true wild one.

She said yes and here we are.

Hours along a dirt road lined with thick trees toward the place we'll make a home. The trailer we're pulling is full of tools we'll need. We'll stay in the RV I purchased until I get the cabin built. Together, as a family, we'll build new memories. We'll make a life where we can be happy and free of the stresses of the outside world.

Me being an orphan, I have no family that would care. And we promised Sabrina's snobby parents that we'd come down to California once a year to visit. Other than that, we're free.

"University of Alaska has a high suicide rate among their students," Devon blurts out. More useless information. "Looks like college is out of the question."

I shake my head. "Two years and then you're going. You promised. That was one of the caveats," I remind her.

Our Siberian huskie, Buddy, barks as if in protest. Six months after we lost Drew, I brought her home that dog. It didn't replace her brother but it gave her a playmate.

She pops her gum and laughs. "Can't blame a girl for trying, Dad. What can college teach me that I don't already know?"

“Manners,” I grunt.

This gets a chuckle from Sabrina. “Maybe how to get a boyfriend.”

“No. Boys. Ever,” I say in a dramatic tone that earns me a huff from behind me.

“Whatever, Dad.”

“Just being real, Pip.”

She snorts. “Don’t try to be hip. You’re not hip.”

“She’s right,” Sabrina says, a smile lighting up her pretty face. “You’re not hip. You’re old.”

“Well, while you’ve been getting massages,” I say and point at Sabrina. “And while you were taking Snapchat selfies,” I say and jerk my head toward Devon. “I was taking the survivalist classes. I chopped all that damn wood for practice too. I may not be hip but I’m basically a god. God of the Great Unknown.”

Both my girls laugh and my heart nearly leaps out of my chest.

This is exactly what we needed.

“Where’s your mom?” I ask as I step into the RV. Buddy trots in behind me and walks right up to Devon to give her a wet kiss.

After wiping her cheek, Devon looks up from a book and frowns. “Headache.”

I roll my eyes. Anytime Sabrina is depressed, she plays it off as a headache. She knows I won’t argue it and she can sleep in peace. “It’ll be dark soon. Want to explore, Pip?”

She tosses her book down and grins. “Let me grab my hiking boots.”

Once she dresses and pulls on a hoodie, I grab my rifle and together we set out on an exploration. We’re another three or four hours from our destination I mapped out but I didn’t want to chance driving the RV and pulling the trailer in the dark. The farther we get inside the dense forest, the harder it will be to travel. According to the previous owner of the land, Atticus Knox, I know that at the end of the road is a small clearing that overlooks a gorge where a fresh water river runs through it. I’d fallen in

love with the pictures he emailed me and paid the hefty sum. He assured me that the area was unpopulated. No people for hundreds of miles. Secluded as fuck. Exactly what I was hoping for. Since we were traveling out of state, I negotiated for him to leave some equipment I'd purchased from him. When we get there, I can essentially start working on our dream home right away.

Devon squats to inspect a plant and I notice a bush with many berries. Her dog sniffs around and his ears perk up when he hears a sound beyond the trees.

"Look," I tell her with a grin as I step through some brush to reach the bush. "Berries."

"Dad! No!"

Buddy barks as if to yell at me too.

I jerk my hand back and frown. "What?"

"Baneberries. Those are poisonous. We don't need you going into cardiac arrest." She stands and makes a motion with her hands. "Step away from the white berries if you want to live."

I laugh but wisely step away. Apparently more than useless information rattles around in that brain of hers. "Okay, so which ones can we eat, Pip?"

She trudges along a few hundred feet and stops before a bush with red berries. "These aren't ripe yet, but they're safe. Promise me you won't eat anything without asking me first?"

I hold my hands up in defense. "Promise."

She sticks out her pinky and her lips quirk into a sweet smile I remember from her when she was a kid. I hook my pinky with hers.

"Pinky promise," we both say.

Her eyes are filled with love and happiness. I knew this move would be life changing. We'll eventually pull Sabrina out of the dark hell she lives in. With time, everything will be perfect.

She releases my hand and continues walking along the edge of the thick forest that overhangs into the road. I've already had to stop more times than I can count to either move limbs or hack through them with the chainsaw. Atticus promised the last few hours of the journey were the hardest. He hasn't been to the property since before winter when I purchased the land from him. Winters here are harsh and unforgiving. The trees are casualties.

Buddy growls and the hairs on my neck stand on end. Heavy crunching resounds about a hundred feet into the thicket on our right.

“Dad…”

“Stay calm.”

Despite all our researching and classes, we’re still city folks. It’s all fun and games until someone sees a bear for the first time.

We wait for what feels like ages. Buddy gets bored and shits. Nothing terrifying emerges from the woods. The sun is setting fast and I fear our little exploration is over for the day.

“Come on, Dev. Let’s get inside and see about dinner.”

She trots back over to me, sidestepping Buddy’s bomb, and I hug her to my side. After Drew died and I picked myself up off the floor, I vowed to give the love I had for two children to the one we had left. I took her to the movies and shopping. Every day I took her to school and picked her up. Any opportunity when I wasn’t traveling or working, I spent with my daughter.

Sabrina sure as hell wasn’t doing the job.

“How about Frito chili pie?” Devon asks. “It’s Mom’s favorite.”

I squeeze her. “You cooking?”

She looks up at me and grins. “I’m the only one who knows the recipe.”

At this, I snort laughing. “Step one, open a can of chili. Step two, heat said chili. Step three, pour over Fritos. Step four, sprinkle the cheese and onions on top. Did I miss anything?”

“You’re such a sarcastic shit, Dad.”

She flings the RV door open and rolls her eyes at me before clomping up the steps.

“Don’t say shit, Pip.”

I close the RV door and lock it out of habit even though nobody will get us out here. By the time I kick off my boots and pull off my jacket, Devon is hard at work on her specialty. The way she effortlessly moves about the small space softly singing one of her favorite pop tunes reminds me of the way Sabrina used to be.

So. Full. Of. Life.

“I’m going to go check on your mom,” I tell her as I pass her in the kitchen. I drop a kiss on the top of her head before scooting past her. Once inside the back bedroom, I close the partition door. It’s dark inside. Sabrina sleeps naked. An invitation. Sometimes when she’s in a dark mood, the only way to bring her back is through sex. The RV is small and the walls are practically non-existent but Devon will be distracted cooking dinner.

I peel off my clothes and crawl into the small bed beside my wife. She's awake but doesn't speak. I've been through this song and dance enough times to know all the motions. Each time I pray she'll snap out of it long enough to love me the way she used to. But every time I'm disappointed. Doesn't stop me from trying.

My mouth finds her throat and I kiss her soft flesh. Her breasts are still firm despite her now being well into her late thirties. I fondle them even though she won't respond. When I start kissing down her throat on a mission to her pussy, she shakes her head in the dark and says one simple word.

No.

I groan in frustration and begin our usual routine. Parting her thighs, I settle on top of her. My dick is having trouble staying hard so I stroke it quickly before pushing into her heat. A sharp gasp is the only evidence I'm fucking a woman and not a corpse.

My mouth tries for hers but she turns her head to the side. It's as though she punishes herself from all forms of pleasure and happiness. If Drew couldn't have it, then why should she. It kills me that she thinks this way.

I desperately try to be quiet, but our bodies slap together. The grunts coming from me are feral and borderline angry. Sometimes I want to grab her by the throat and shake some goddamned sense into her.

Sabrina never comes.

Never.

She lets me use her as an outlet so *I* can come. So she can tie us together —no matter how loose it is—in the only way she knows how. It's always been enough. Just barely.

"I love you," I whisper, my breath hissing from me.

She doesn't respond.

My eyes clench shut and I come hard. I've barely finished spurting out my release before I'm yanking out of her. I snag my shirt and wipe my dick off before tossing it into the corner. Neither of us speak. I just came and I should be relaxed but I'm pissed off. This trip was supposed to help. If anything, she seems worse on the first night on our land.

"Dinner will be ready soon. Devon cooked your favorite," I spit out as I yank my jeans on.

"I'm not hungry."

It takes everything in me not to go off on her.

“Night,” I bite out.

She doesn’t respond.

When I yank open the divider, Devon wears a guilty look as she stares down at her bowl of Frito chili pie. She’s set out two more bowls and even made her mother a glass of lemonade. Bitterness threatens to tear me in half but I swallow it down.

“Smells good, Pip,” I say, my tone gruff.

Her watery eyes lift to meet mine. It fucking breaks my heart. No sixteen-year-old girl should have to deal with this shit. She glances at my bare chest and then looks down at her food.

“I’m sorry you had to hear that.” The sex. The rejection. The slow death of my marriage.

“It’s fine, Dad.”

I settle in across from her and eat dinner alone with my daughter. Just like every other goddamned day.

And I eat Sabrina’s untouched bowl just to make Devon smile again.

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CHAPTER TWO

devon

I try my cell phone, but I have no signal. I lost the signal days ago. We're really doing this. Living off the grid. I'm going to find me a hillbilly toothless wild man deep in the woods and have all his babies.

When I chuckle, Dad's eyes meet mine in the mirror. His kind brown eyes always bring me comfort.

"What's so funny back there?"

"Just imagining finding a hillbilly boyfriend. We're going to have lots of babies," I explain.

"No. Boys. Ever."

Buddy barks again. Stupid dog seems to agree with Dad on that one every time.

"Guess I'll have to wait until college to get my freak on," I say with a sigh and feign boredom. Truth is, I wouldn't know what to do with a boy if I had one. Having gone to an all-girl school my entire life, the only interaction with guys were the ones from the neighborhood. I've not been kissed, and I certainly haven't done anything more.

Dad growls and Mom laughs. She's more herself today. A few smiles here and there. She even sang with me through a couple of oldies on the CD I'd burned back home. I'd never seen Dad look so happy. One of these days I'm going to help Mom to remember that we're her family. That we need her. She'll laugh and smile and love us like we love her.

And Dad can be happy again.

Truly happy.

Reed Jamison puts on a strong face, but I've seen him at his lowest. Bawling his eyes out like a child. It crushed my heart. When Drew died, I cried. But when my father cried, I think I lost a part of my soul that day.

Mom has always been sad. Detached. Lost. Drew and I always felt as if we were a burden to her. And when he died, she went completely off the deep end with no hope of ever coming back. Dad seems hopeful and for him, I hope too.

I promised myself that I'd always be his sidekick. His best friend. His little girl. I would do well in school, behave always, and never argue about chores. Dad did so much for our family. It was the least I could offer for him.

"Don't eat the white berries," I remind everyone in the car for the millionth time. Buddy agrees and barks.

Dad winks in the mirror. "We'll save them for your hillbilly boyfriend."

I'm happily reading one of my romance novels when the RV starts to slow.

"Oh, shit. This one's big," he complains as he rolls to a stop in front of a massive fallen tree.

"I'm glad we're stopping," Mom says in the detached voice I know so well. "I have a headache coming on."

Heat creeps up my throat as I remembered last night. They had sex. It didn't sound very fun. Dad seemed angry. Mom didn't make a peep. All I could hear was their heavy breathing, the slapping of flesh, and his grunts. The entire RV shook and rattled. I was so embarrassed. Sure, I've seen sex in movies and read about it in my books, but that was the first time I've ever heard it. Experienced it in live action.

When I lift my eyes, Dad's are on mine. Once again apologetic. I want to tell him it's not his fault she's the way she is but he won't believe me. He's exactly like me. Confident we can somehow fix her one day.

"Come on, Pip. I need an extra pair of hands, and your mother has a headache," he seethes, his jaw clenching as he turns to regard her.

She's unfazed and simply shrugs.

With a strangled curse word, he slings the door open and steps out. The door slams behind him scaring the crap out of me.

"Go help your father before he has a coronary," she says in a bored tone.

“It’s hot,” I whine as I swipe sweat from my brow.

Dad is hot too because he’s long since yanked off his shirt. He’s pissed and has been taking it out on the tree for the past three hours. I’ve escaped only long enough to fetch us water.

“Go inside with your mother,” he barks out before kicking the tree.

I flinch at his outburst. “Dad…”

He jerks his fiery gaze my way. My dad is usually all smiles and full of love. His anger toward my mom though has cast a permanent scowl on his face today. I want to make it go away.

Running over to him, I throw my arms around his waist. He’s stiff at first but then seems to melt at my affection. Soon, his fingers run through my ponytail in an absent way. His lips press to the top of my head—a sign that everything is going to be okay.

I believe him.

He’s sweaty and smells a little rank from all the hard work in the late May afternoon sun, but I inhale him and memorize his scent. Not many things comfort me, but my Dad is one of them. His heartbeat is loud with my ear pressed against his chest. I love to listen to the strong cadence of it. When I was younger, I used to make up songs that went with the beat.

“Everything’s going to be okay,” I vow and squeeze him tighter.

He lets out a heavy sigh. “Promise, Pip?”

“Pinky promise.”

Mom has slept all day in the back. Normally, it hurts my feelings, but today feels different. Today we find our new home. Dad and I are on an adventure.

I steal a glance his way. His aviator sunglasses sit perched on his nose and his shoulders are relaxed. A half smile plays at his lips. He's excited just like me. The scruff is beginning to grow on his jaw. It gives him a rugged appearance. Before we left San Francisco, he playfully teased he would grow out a beard. I can't help but grin imagining my dad's normally clean shaven face full of wiry hair like Mr. Bobbitt, my old chemistry teacher.

"What are you smiling about?" he asks, turning his attention briefly from the road to glance over at me.

I shrug and kick my bare feet up on the dash. "Just thinking about getting to our new home. I'm looking forward to it."

He reaches over and takes my hand. I get a quick squeeze of assurance before he releases me. The road seems to end and Dad drives slower than usual. When we emerge from the trees, we come upon a small clearing on the top of what feels like a mountain.

The road simply ends.

"Dad!" I screech and point through the windshield. "We made it!"

He's just as eager as I am. Both of us bolting out of our doors as soon as the RV is parked. Dad reaches the edge of the cliff first. I approach slowly behind him. The edge drops off at least two hundred feet straight down into a gorge. A rushing river winds through the trees down below.

"It's beautiful," I gasp, my hand clutching my chest. "The pictures didn't do it justice."

He pulls me to him and we hug. "We're here, Pip. Finally." Hope tinges his words. Hope that we'll all go back to normal. After all this time, we'll be a family again.

I get a kiss on the top of my head before he releases me. Walking over to the edge, I point down. "How do we get down there? I want to go down there."

"I'm not sure, but we'll devote the morning looking," he promises. I don't need his pinky to know he'll be good on his word. "I'm going to move the RV parallel to that area." He points along the edge. "That way, we can block the northerly wind if we want to have a fire tonight. What do you say, Dev? S'mores? Might be the last time you ever have them until we visit your grandparents."

My stomach groans with hunger. "Yes!"

I help direct Dad while he moves the RV where he wants it. It takes some maneuvering, and at one point he curses up a storm when he gets one of the wheels stuck, but we eventually get it the way it needs to be.

While Dad messes about outside, I run inside to break the news to Mom. I find her staring out the side window in their room that overlooks the gorge below. No smiles. No excitement. No anything.

"Mom…"

She shoos me on. "Devon, my head is killing me. Go help your father."

Tears of rejection fill my eyes and I nod. I obey and go help my father.

We cook hot dogs on the open fire and then indulge in s'mores. Mom stays in the bedroom.

"It's cold." I tuck my hands into the big pocket of my hoodie. "It's practically summer. Why is it cold?"

Dad chuckles and takes a long pull on his beer. "Earlier you were complaining it was too hot. Which is it, Pip?"

I stick my tongue out at him but hold my feet out toward the fire.

"Come here." He pats his lap like he used to do when I was a kid.

With a silly grin on my face, I leap at the chance to sit on my dad's lap. He's warm and cozy. Strong and protective. He wraps me up in a hug and I rest my ear to his chest. The familiar cadence of his heart thrums in my ear, drowning out the forest sounds. He pets my hair and then kisses the top of my head.

I must fall asleep because I wake as he carries me inside. The fire has long since dwindled. He sets me down on the sofa bed and then covers me up with my favorite quilt. His fingers stroke along my cheek before he gets up and darkens the RV. Despite being sleepy, I feel my ears perk up at every sound.

The sliding of the partition as he shuts it.

The jangle of Dad's belt.

Murmured voices.

And then the grunts.

Heat burns through me as the RV rocks another night in a row. Mom seems to participate because she lets out a moan. I'm embarrassed when heat begins to pool in my lower belly. I kick off my quilt and shimmy out of my jeans.

Grunt. Grunt. Grunt.

More murmured voices. The words belong to Dad. He sounds angry.

A slap.

And then the RV really starts shaking.

More slaps as she calls him every name in the book.

He bellows something unintelligible to her.

Then I hear what sounds like smacking sounds.

They're kissing.

A flare of jealousy flits through me and I'm immediately horrified by it. It just upsets me that she ignores us all day and then gets his undivided attention and affection. She doesn't deserve it after the way she treats him.

Another loud groan.

Shame ripples through me the moment I slip my fingers down between my thighs. I've touched myself before, but I'm not very good at it. All I know is it feels good when I touch a certain spot. Greedily, I rub at that spot. I'm craving the relief it will give me. Relief I've found before on occasion. It's always been difficult to get there and sometimes it never happens.

My ears ring and drown out their sounds as I furiously rub at myself. I'm no longer staring toward their partition door but am instead giving in to the electric sensations burning through me. I'm hot and sweaty. Quickly, I tear off my hoodie and then get right back to rubbing myself. I let out a choked sound the moment pleasure steals me from this reality. A loud sigh escapes me and I blink my eyes back open.

Light.

It shines from the bathroom out into the hallway.

Dad stands there in just his jeans glaring at me. When our eyes meet, he shakes his head in disproval before storming into the tiny bathroom. He slams the door shut.

Tears prickle my eyes. Shame courses through me tainting my recent orgasm. How am I going to explain that to him? He looked so pissed. I start to cry and quickly drag the quilt up my body even though I'm sweating.

When Dad finally emerges, I pretend to sleep. I can feel him watching me in the darkness for a few moments before he retreats to their room.

I'm sorry, Dad.

I wake with a start.

I heard something.

Fear clutches my heart and I slip out of my bed hurrying to my parents' bedroom. Dad snores softly and Mom seems to be asleep too. Like I did when I was a little girl, I climb in between them. I slide my arm around Mom's middle and bury my face in her hair. She pats my arm absently in her sleep. The small moment of affection sets my heart on fire. I'm just relaxing when Dad rolls over and hugs me from behind. I retreat from my mother and seek his safety. Dad is strong and solid behind me. His arm curls around me and his lips find my hair. It grounds me.

Nothing will get me with him having my back.

He's still breathing heavily in a deep sleep, and it drowns out what I now realize is thunder. The RV shakes from the wind. Soon the rain starts to pound. A chill ripples through me. I start wiggling to get under the covers with them. Eventually, I manage to slide beneath their quilt. Dad's warm chest pressed against my back through my T-shirt heats my chilled body.

I manage to doze off but wake up again because the storm is going crazy outside. Lightning cracks every few minutes and the wind threatens to rip the top off the RV. I'm distracted, however, when Dad hugs me tighter. As though, even in sleep, he knows I need comfort.

I wiggle up against him again, and something hardens from behind me. His snores continue on but his penis presses against my butt through his boxers. My entire body stills. The storm is nothing in comparison to the way my heart jackhammers in my chest. I've never seen or felt a penis in person. The one poking into me is intimidating. I start to move away but he lets out a big snore like he might wake soon. His palm slides under my shirt. Skin against skin. Heat burns through me at a rate I can't compute. I know he'd have a conniption fit if he woke up right now and found us this

way. And yet I can’t bring myself to move away. His touch comforts me like no other person can. When his palm slides up to cup my small breast, my breathing stops altogether.

I want him to touch me everywhere.

The thought—so sudden and fierce—has a low, embarrassed sound escaping me. His thumb brushes against my nipple causing it to harden and me to shudder. I’ve never been touched by a boy and yet here I am at second base with my dad.

My skin is on fire now.

I should be moving away.

I definitely shouldn’t be wiggling my butt again just so he’ll stay hard. It fascinates me that a man can have an erection in his sleep.

“Sabrina,” he murmurs, his voice thick with sleep. He’s trapped within the dream world and he thinks I’m Mom.

I don’t wake him or correct him.

I bite my lip and revel in his soft, possessive touch. The way his hips have begun slowly bucking against me. His hand abandons my breast, and I almost pout, but then my flesh ignites as his palm slides along my toned stomach to my panties. They’re soaked and I’m horrified how turned on I am right now. The moment his fingers rub me in the spot that feels good over my wet panties, I jerk in his arms.

Explosive sensations shoot through me, far more powerful than the lightning and thundering outside. It feels a thousand times better than when I touch myself. My body is squirming and moving against his touch, desperate for more. More of what? I’m not sure. I just want more.

His breathing is quiet now and I realize he’s awake.

I had my chance to move away but now he’s awake and will flip out once he realizes what is happening. Still, I can’t be the one to break the spell.

He kisses my neck and murmurs my mother’s name as his fingers slip past my panties.

“So wet, Sabrina,” he breathes against my flesh.

My eyes roll back in my head the moment he begins pushing his finger between my drenched folds seeking entrance to a place that even I haven’t touched. Fire blooms deep in the pit of my belly. As he enters my body with just one of his fingers, the burn is almost too much to bear. I let out a whimper as a tear leaks out, but I don’t want him to stop.

His entire body goes completely stiff and still. Slowly, he pulls his finger away. I feel him pat me and then pat my mother.

“Fuck!” he snarls in the dark. “Fuck!”

Mom stirs from her side of the bed but I can’t move. I’m too horrified by his reaction. I attempt to pretend to sleep.

“Devon.” His voice cracks and I swear he’s going to cry again. Like those early days after Drew had died.

A sob escapes me and I roll over to face him, seeking his comfort. I bury my face against his chest, reveling in the way his hot flesh is sweaty against my bare stomach now that my shirt is pushed up. The connection sends fire surging through me once again and his erection bounces against me.

“Fuck,” he growls and pushes me away.

He climbs out of bed and starts jerking on clothes. I can’t stop crying. I don’t understand why he’s so mad. I mean, deep down I get it. He just touched his daughter in the dark. But it wasn’t his fault. He thought it was Mom. I’m the sick one because I let it happen.

“Dad—”

“No, goddammit!” he barks out, waking my mother. “I need to think.”

He yanks the partition closed and starts slamming things around in the kitchen. I snuggle close to my mom, my tears freely falling.

“Everything okay, sweetie?” Her voice is soft and real. Like the one I remember before we lost Drew.

“Momma,” I sob.

The camper seems to move. Is Dad driving us somewhere?

Cracks and hisses and crushes.

My belly seems to float right out of my body as I fly out of the bed, my head cracking against the ceiling.

What’s happening?

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CHAPTER THREE

reed

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck!

I didn't just touch my daughter.

Did.

Not.

Fucking.

Happen.

Hysteria rises in my chest and I gag. Hot, furious tears sting at my eyes. I just ruined all of our lives in the blink of an eye because I thought it was Sabrina I was touching. I should have known my goddamned wife wouldn't respond to my touch.

Bile rises in my throat.

That means my daughter *did* enjoy it.

I snarl out a string of furious curse words.

I've probably just fucked up her head royally for the rest of her life over one stupid moment. I start slamming cabinets on a search for some hard liquor. I need a fucking drink so I can think of how I will fix this.

I.

Will.

Fix.

This.

I have to. That's my baby girl.

The storm is violent outside, and it matches my raging heart. Everything rattles and shakes. My daughter sobs from the other room causing my heart to shatter into a million pieces.

Don't worry, Pip. I'll make it right again. Just let me cool the fuck off.

A loud, earthly groan is the only warning I have that something is seriously off. And then I'm free falling. My shoulder slams against the ceiling before I get tossed across the room.

Crunch.

Smash.

Rip.

The yelp of our dog.

So many awful noises I can't make sense of anything.

Pop! Pop! Pop!

My head slams against every surface and all I can think about is *thank God* Dev and her mother are safe in the bedroom. It's my last thought before everything goes black.

Black.

Black.

And still falling.

I think I'm tumbling straight to hell.

After what I did, I deserve to go there.

But they sure as hell don't.

Black.

Screams.

Loud, ear piercing wails.

Devon.

She and Drew are out in the backyard. By the way she's screaming as though she's trying to wake the dead, I know she's in severe pain. I charge down the stairs knocking a few frames off the wall as I tear along toward her. My bare feet hit the cold marble floors and I skid to a stop long enough to shove my feet into my boots. Then, I'm running through the house and out the back door. The screen door slams behind me as I sprint toward the edge of the woods behind the house. Long ago I built her and Drew a treehouse.

What if she broke her arm?

Worse yet, her neck?

Bile rises in my throat as I run.

My first inclination is to blame Sabrina. I was buried in paperwork while she did God knows what. She's probably fucking napping. So help me if something happens to Devon…

I find her standing in the clearing, her blonde hair wild. Her face is bright red as she sobs. Rushing over to her, I pull her into my arms and then start assessing her for damages. I kneel down and take her small face in my hands.

"Where are you hurt, Pip?"

Her face crumples as she sobs and points up at the treehouse. My heart ceases to beat.

"It's Drew?"

She nods.

"Stay here," I instruct as I scale the small ladder up the tree.

Her wails are all I can hear.

A sound so devastating I'm not sure I'll ever get it to leave my memory bank. It'll probably haunt me until the day I die.

My head is throbbing.

Screams.

It only intensifies my headache, but it does pull me from my fog a bit. I absently pat at my forehead above my right brow. The skin is split there and hot blood rushes from it spilling over my eye. Using my palm, I press it to the wound to keep it from bleeding and try to make sense of what just happened.

I'm still in the RV.

Everything is mangled and crumpled and broken.

The RV is on its side, and I'm lying along the wall in between the cabinets and the stove.

"Devon," I croak out. "Sabrina."

My voice can barely be heard over the howling wind and torrential rains that still rattle the camper. I groan as I try to pry myself from my position. Nothing feels broken. My head just fucking hurts.

“Daddy!”

The scream, so sharp and terrified, jolts me completely out of my daze. It reminds me of that day when I thought she was hurt. And just like then, I scramble to find her. Her hysterical sobs are coming from the bedroom where I last left her.

Where you had your finger inside her…

I grit my teeth and push that into the recesses of my mind. I have more important things to worry about like my wife and my daughter’s safety. The trek to the back where her cries haven’t lessened is difficult. The RV is torn to shreds and rain pours in through a hole right before I get to the bedroom. I manage to yank the partition door up so I can squeeze through.

Lightning flashes and I get a sense of where Devon is at. Over and over the lightning illuminates the sky, allowing me to see fairly easily.

What I see nearly has me vomiting.

A tree has come through one window, a long and slender pine, and gone through the other window. Like a toothpick right through a sausage. My daughter’s legs dangle from the upper window. A thin branch from the tree has impaled her on the side. Each time she wiggles, she slides further against the branch.

“Devon,” I bellow over the storm, finally finding my voice. “Don’t move.”

“Daddy!”

Despite my orders, she kicks her legs frantically. I clamber over to her and let go of my forehead to grab her legs in a bear hug so she’ll stop moving. She’s sobbing so hard that her body trembles. I kiss her flesh and then try to inspect the branch stabbing her.

“Listen to me, Devon. I need you to calm down. I’m going to get you out of here.” My gaze scans the small ruined room and Sabrina is nowhere to be found. Sickness roils in my belly. “Baby, can you see your mother. Tell me what you can see.”

“It’s raining too hard,” she screeches. “I can’t see anything. Lightning is going to strike me!”

Gritting my teeth, I lift her by her ass. She starts screaming in pain.

“See if you can climb up some,” I holler. “I need to get this branch out of you.”

I help her put her foot on my shoulder. Quickly she understands what she’s supposed to do and kicks against me. Her howls are enough to crush my heart but my strong girl manages to slide off the branch. When she’s free of it, I grab it and break it. Then, I slowly ease her back down into the camper with me. As soon as she’s free, she latches onto me bawling her eyes out.

“Dev, I need to stop the bleeding. Let me see your wound.” My voice is hoarse from exertion. We’ve fallen back against the mattress that is standing up since the RV is on its side. I don’t have the energy to move. Blood rushes from the gash on my forehead and our bodies are slick against each other from the rain and blood from her stomach.

“I-I’m t-tired, Daddy.” Her teeth are chattering wildly. I think she’s going into shock.

I jerk my eyes open. I’m tired and dazed, but I can’t just lie here. Sabrina is missing. Both Devon and I have wounds that need tending. And yet I can’t move. Blindly, I reach for the quilt and try to wrap it around us. Devon is shivering so badly that I think warming her up is the first order of business. She burrows against me as though she’s trying to crawl inside my skin. I hug her to me and kiss the top of her soaked head. We slump down—me falling on my ass and her nearly strangling me so I won’t let her go.

She cries and cries.

I have to be strong for her.

My eyes droop and my muscles feel as though they weigh a ton. I can’t seem to find the energy or strength to do anything else. Her fingernails dig into my chest. As my eyes start to close, I have the forethought to maneuver her so that her wound is pressed against my stomach. Hopefully that’s enough to stop the bleeding.

“Rest for just a bit, Pip.”

“Daddy.”

The voice is soft and sweet. I don’t walk toward it but I run for it.

My eyes crack open, and I’m blinded by a sunray that’s shining in on me. It takes one horrible second to remember the chaos that happened last night. When I start to frown, something tugs at my forehead. I try to rip at it, but someone grips my wrist and pulls it away.

“Don’t touch it. I bandaged you up,” Devon whispers softly. A sob tears from her. “Buddy has vanished.”

I tilt my head to the left to avoid the bright sun and stare at my daughter. Her blonde hair is wavy, damp, full of leaves, and caked with blood. The dog is probably smashed under the RV.

“He’ll turn up.” Lies. “Your stomach,” I croak, my hand fumbling across her chest.

She lets out a whimper when I yank the fabric up to see. Her entire chest is scratched up like she took a slide face first down hot concrete. Both of her small breasts bore the brunt of the attack. But what has me most worried is her stomach. She seemed to have found the first aid kit because her abdomen is bandaged up too. Blood stains the gauze. I’ll probably have to stitch her up soon.

“Have you been outside? Have you seen your mother?” I’m still frowning at the scratches on her breasts and stomach when she slowly stands letting her shirt fall back down.

“Dad…” Her bottom lip wobbles. “Let’s just stay in here. I’ll find you something to eat.”

I close my eyes. The horror in her eyes is all I need to see. Sabrina is gone.

“Help me up,” I grunt.

She grabs my wrist and helps me to my feet. When I sway, she hugs my waist. “I think you have a concussion,” she whispers against my bloody still-bare chest.

I swallow and stroke her matted hair. “I’ll be fine. We need to figure out what happened.”

Her head tilts up to regard me. Fresh new tears well in her eyes making her blue eyes seem like lakes. “The cliff gave out. Washed away right underneath us last night. Must have been all the rainwater and the weight of the RV.”

Guilt claws its way up inside me. “This is all my fault.”

She shakes her head in vehemence. “No.”

I clench my jaw and give her a clipped nod. She releases me and clumsily starts ambling out of the room and down through the camper. I follow after her, my head throbbing in pain. She's barefoot and wears nothing but a T-shirt and her bloody panties. I'm stuck in a pair of jeans but still shirtless and shoeless. We're a mess. I'll need to find us clothes, but first I need to find Sabrina.

The window that used to be beside the table has been smashed out. As if she's done this once already, Devon grabs the edge of the window, uses the bench seat at the table for leverage, and hoists herself out. Her legs flail as she tries to climb through. I grab her slender thighs and push her through. The metal of the RV groans as she walks along the outer side. My head hurts like a motherfucker but I easily hoist myself through the opening as I'm taller and stronger than my daughter. The moment I'm out of the hole, my breath catches in my throat.

We fell.

RV. Trailer. Everything.

At least two hundred feet down the side of the cliff. Trees, along our path of descent, are destroyed. Just the one tree seems to have impaled the RV. All of our belongings and tools and food are scattered over trees and along the forest floor. When I look to my left, I'm sickened to see some of it floating down the river.

"Where is she?"

Devon points through a few trees but doesn't look. As soon as I see Sabrina, I wish I hadn't looked. She hangs upside down from a tree by her foot that's caught on a branch. Her arm—Jesus fucking Christ—has been torn from her shoulder and dangles in the wind, barely held on by some muscle. Her other leg hangs off to the side in an obscene way. Her eyes remain open and her tongue hangs out.

Fuck.

Fucking gruesome goddamned shit.

"Daddy…"

"Stay there," I bark as I slide down the side of the RV to the muddy earth. A stick stabs my foot but I ignore it. Hobbling over to my wife, I pray it's just a figment of my imagination. That she's not dead. Simply passed out.

"Sabrina," I call out as I rush over to her.

So much blood.

While I was trying to save our daughter, she was out here bleeding to death. I didn't look for her. I just held our daughter and fell asleep. What the fuck?

I run my fingers through my hair and roar at the top of my lungs.

This was supposed to be our new life.

Our motherfucking happiness.

Not this.

It was never supposed to be this.

Falling to my knees, I let out a choked cry. "S-Sabrina. I'm s-so sorry."

Devon, despite being told to stay, squeezes me from behind. Her thin arms hug my neck as sobs make her entire body tremble. I stand back up and shake her off me.

"Go back to the RV," I snarl. "I need to take care of this."

"N-No, Dad. I'm going to help."

I glare at her, but she lifts her chin in defiance. I want to scream at her that now's not the time to back talk. She needs to fucking listen. But she looks so goddamned brave and fearless right now. Her mother is hanging dead from a tree like something out of a horror flick and she's begging to help.

"We need to find you clothes." My throat aches with emotion. There is so much that needs to be done to take care of her. I'm fucking overwhelmed. I don't even know where to start. But I hate that she's standing there in a torn shirt and panties, covered in blood.

"We can look for some after we help Mom," she whispers. "I promise."

With my jaw clenched, I reach forward and offer her my pinky. She hooks hers with mine and then we release our hands. I break away from her sad gaze to try and grab onto Sabrina's good arm. I'm about four feet too short.

"Put me on your shoulders. I can pull her down," Devon says as she comes to stand in front of me.

Since it's the quickest solution, I kneel down. She slides her thigh over my shoulder and then the other. I grip her legs so she won't fall as I rise. We wobble as she reaches for her mother.

My sweet, brave daughter has to tug her dead mother from a damn tree.

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CHAPTER FOUR

devon

Her skin is cold and hard. A sob catches in my throat but I refuse to let it escape. Dad is exhausted and about to lose his mind. The last thing I need is to give in to hysteria. Last night was the worst night of my life. When I woke up half sticking out of the RV with a branch stabbing me, I'd freaked out.

But he saved me.

I knew he would.

This morning, I was scared to death when I woke up. Dad was out of it and too pale. It took some hunting but I found the first aid kit in the bathroom still intact. He didn't rouse or anything when I bandaged him up. My biggest fear was that I'd lose my parents and I'd be all alone. Even my dog was missing, although I had a sneaking suspicion we'll find his bones one day beneath the RV or trailer. My heart aches for all the loss.

Deep down, I knew Mom was gone before I even discovered her body. I just felt it deep in my soul. And as devastated as I was, all I kept thinking was that she was happy with Drew now. Mom could finally be at peace.

It's chilly this morning, especially after the storm, and I shiver as I attempt to pull Mom down by her good arm. The branch groans but doesn't release her. Dad grunts from exertion as he tries to hold me upright. For several long minutes, I pull and pull.

"Time to come down," he utters. "This isn't working."

"I can do it," I argue, lifting my entire body off his shoulders in an attempt to use all of my weight to bring her down.

A sick cracking sound is my only warning before I go crashing at least ten feet to the forest floor. Dad tries to catch me but he isn't quick enough.

My ankle turns in a painful way and then my mother's cold body lands on top of me.

"Get it off!" I screech.

He grunts and pushes her body off of mine. Red hot pain radiates from my ankle and I grab it tenderly, fresh tears streaming down my cheeks. I stare up at him helplessly.

"We're going to die out here." My lip wobbles.

Fierce determination glints in his chocolate brown eyes. "We are not going to die, Pip. Don't talk like that."

I swallow and nod as he kneels to inspect my ankle. Gently, he takes the back of my calf and brings my foot into his lap. It's already swelling quickly. He presses in some places and moves it in ways that make me scream. Then, he brings my foot up and kisses my ankle bone. It's something he's always done. Kissed my ouchies. This time, after everything that happened last night, feels awkward.

Heat once again prickles at my flesh.

Embarrassment floods through me and I look away.

"I need to do something with…" he trails off and his throat bobs. "Then, I am going to start collecting everything that is strewn about. We need to salvage what we can."

"What should I do?"

He helps me to my feet, his strong hands gripping my elbows. When I put weight on my foot, I cry out in pain.

"You're going to stay inside and rest."

Before I can argue, he scoops me into his arms and begins the trek back to the demolished RV. I cling to him and wish this was all a bad nightmare. That maybe I went to sleep too upset last night about the accidental touching, and I'll wake up soon to Dad making pancakes.

But I don't wake up.

The chilly air makes me shiver.

Reality is cold.

He hugs me closer to him.

"I don't think I can get you back inside. I'm going to try and pull out one of the tents from the storage bin. That part of the RV looks intact, so hopefully we can have some sort of shelter tonight." He sets me down on a rock before sauntering away. The sun beats down, but it isn't warm. Cold air blasts me from the north every few minutes making my teeth chatter. I

rub my arms and watch Dad as he hoists himself up on the side of the RV. His back muscles flex as he pries the hatch open.

“Fuck yes!” he hollers before pulling the bagged tent from the compartment and holding it above his head like a prize. His bicep flexes, and I find myself staring at it.

In fact, I must be in total shock because I stare at my father like he might disappear at any moment. I catalog his every expression. The sound of his voice. Each time he assures me everything is going to be okay.

Within fifteen minutes, he has a tent erected. Then, he disappears back into the RV. When he comes back, he’s carrying some blankets that were folded and stored in a cabinet that must have survived along with two pillows.

“Can you make our bed?” he asks as he holds out the blankets.

I try not to blush. Our bed. I’m so stupid. It reminds me of last night in their bed.

“Y-Yes.”

“As soon as you get it made, prop that foot up,” he instructs. “I’m going to go…” His gaze drifts to where Mom’s body remains unmoving a few yards away. “Bury her.”

I shake my head. “Don’t, Dad. The ground isn’t deep here with all these rocks. You’ll use up all your energy. Just…” Tears well in my eyes and I point at the river that rushes by. “Just let her go.”

His features darken, but I can tell he’s considering my words. He reaches forward and strokes my hair out of my eyes. “Everything is going to be okay, Pip. We can do this. Make smart decisions. Be strong. We’ve got this.”

I smile and nod.

He storms off to deal with Mom. He didn’t pinky promise.

“Wake up, Devon. You need to eat and drink something.”

I jolt awake and look around me in confusion. The sky is dark and I can see a fire going just outside the tent.

“How long did I sleep for?” I rasp out.

His face is shadowed in the dark tent. I can’t make out his features. “I’m guessing around twelve hours.”

“Dad!” I cry out, horrified that he’s been dealing with this mess alone. “Why didn’t you wake me?”

“You needed the rest and I had it handled. Eat this,” he instructs, handing me a warm can with a spoon sticking out of the top.

Chili.

I hungrily devour the chili. He watches me the entire time. It’s then I realize he’s cleaned up some and found a shirt.

“Did you find our clothes?”

“I did. I put them in the other tent for now with the other supplies I thought needed protecting from the elements and critters.” He reaches over into a bowl and wrings out a wash cloth. “I also found the soap.” His grin in the darkness seems to light up the space. “Lie back and let me look at your stomach.”

I hand him the empty can and fall back against the blankets. A shiver ripples through me when he pushes my shirt up past my breasts. My breath hitches but he doesn’t seem to notice. He peels away the bandages and groans. Soon, a flashlight clicks on and he puts it between his teeth. I sneak a peek down at my abdomen. The wound still gapes. In a clinical way, he sets to scrubbing at all of my scratches on my torso with the warm soapy rag. It stings and I whimper, but he doesn’t stop. When the rag runs over my breasts, my nipples harden. I let out a sharp breath that has his hand stalling. He cleans each breast well and then the rest of my torso before inspecting the gash.

“I’m going to have to stitch it up,” he tells me once he plucks the flashlight from his mouth. “It may hurt, Pip. Can you be brave for me?”

I nod. Tears already stream from my eyes. This whole situation is painful. What’s a little bit more? He has the first aid kit handy. With the flashlight once again in his mouth, he threads the needle and then sets to stitching me.

“Owwww,” I complain, my hands fisting the blanket.

“Don’t squirm.”

I clench my eyes closed and try to breathe calmly through my nose as he carefully closes my wound. Each time he pours alcohol in it, I scream. Eventually, he gets it stitched and rewrapped in bandages.

“Take your clothes off,” he orders before exiting the tent.

I’m so shocked that I don’t move until he returns carrying my hoodie and some yoga pants. Sheepishly, I tug off my soiled shirt and hand it to him. He waits, his flashlight blinding me, for the rest. My heart is hammering in my chest as I wiggle out of my panties. I can’t see his face as I hand him the panties.

“Use the rag to clean up. I’ll bring you some water and some Ibuprofen in a minute.” He disappears once again.

Quickly, I give myself a sponge bath and wish I could wash the blood and dirt from my hair. Once I’m clean, I pull on my warm clothes. All of the movements have left me exhausted. Dad eventually returns with a bag. He drops it just inside the tent along with a shotgun. Then, he takes the water bowl out with him.

When he returns, he stumbles.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m just tired,” he says in a thick voice as he zips up the tent behind him.

Our tent is small, meant for just me, but we make it work. The other tent my parents were supposed to share. He kicks off some shoes he found, and I wait until he’s settled on the pillow beside me before I grab the blanket to draw it over us. I curl up against his warm body and hug him tight.

“I’m scared,” I admit in a whisper.

“Me too.”

“Are we going to die?”

He strokes my matted hair and kisses the top of my head. “Pip, we’re going to live. Day by day. We’ll do it. Be strong for me. Promise me that.”

I lift my pinky and he takes it. We link them but this time we don’t let go as we fall fast asleep.

Something grunts outside our tent in the middle of the night. I can hear it snort as it sniffs around. Just when I think it will rip open our tent and

attack us, its heavy footsteps retreat. The temperature has dropped and I'm freezing. I snuggle closer to Dad for warmth.

"Dad," I whisper. "I'm cold."

He rouses and his hand absently strokes my cheek. "What, baby?"

"I'm cold."

"Take off your hoodie." His voice is thick with sleep. Surely I misheard him.

"No, it's too cold."

He lets out a tired sigh. "Body heat. I'm fucking cold too." He sits up and tugs his shirt off. "Pip, take it off."

I nod and reluctantly peel it away. Before I can even complain about the cold, his arm wraps around me and he spoons me from behind. His arm is hot against my cold flesh and he splays his palm out over my chest bone. Soon, his breathing evens back out but my heart is still hammering in my chest. Thoughts from the night before keep replaying. The way his thumb brushed over my nipple. How he urged his finger inside of me. I don't even realize I'm wiggling with need until I feel his hardness against my butt.

I freeze and listen for his snores but he's quiet. He doesn't move away like last night. Instead, he keeps me locked in his grip.

"I'll keep you safe," he whispers, his hot breath against my neck.

My entire body relaxes at his words. "Thank you."

Sleep must steal me away because I wake at some point overheated. We're facing each other and a tangled mess of limbs. While he sleeps, I explore his hard chest with my fingertips. My fingers continue their trek to his sculpted shoulders and then up his throat. I touch his scruffy cheek and then his soft lips.

"Go to sleep, Pip." His voice is a deep rumble as he grips my wrist and tugs me against him. My breasts smash against his hot chest.

"Okay."

He has a death grip on my wrist but the moment he starts softly snoring again, I hike my thigh up along his toned leg. My breath hitches when my knee rubs against his erection. I'm going to combust. The thoughts and feelings surging through my mind are sinful and wrong but I can't stop thinking about the way he touched me last night.

I'm losing my mind, clearly.

My mom was brutally killed. I've yet to mourn her. It's like my mind has shut off that reality. When I shudder, he hugs me tighter. My thigh is

pressed against his hot erection through his jeans and I keep wiggling against him as if to seek relief from the friction.

“Please go to sleep, Devon. Please.” His voice is so pained, so raw, that I can’t help but obey.

“Okay.”

And I do.

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CHAPTER FIVE

reed

I wake with an embarrassing hard-on. My daughter is clinging to me as if I'll leave her at any moment, half naked I might add, and my dick is hard.

It's just morning wood.

That's what I tell myself.

My body's natural response.

I'm dreading the day ahead of me. So much needs to be done. Yesterday I gathered our shit to the point of exhaustion. Today, I can hardly move.

Devon's palm slides to my lower stomach and I hold my breath. I know she's asleep. The sound of her breathing is rhythmic. Unlike last night.

Heat bubbles up inside of me. Angry heat. She's getting confused and I don't know what to do about it. Her life was literally turned upside down. She's clinging to whatever she can. I'm all she has left. I wish I knew how to undo what's already been done though. The parts where I accidentally touched her and how she thinks she can freely touch me now.

I'm not a sicko.

I'm not a motherfucking child molester.

Her knee bumps my dick and I groan. I have to get out of this tent. With a grumble, I slide out from beneath her and grab my shirt. I'm sitting on my knees putting it on when I feel her staring at me. Stupid me chances a glance her way.

She lies there with her arm curved above her head. The blanket reveals her scraped up left breast, the nipple peaked and at attention. Her pouty lips are parted and she stares at me with a look I don't understand from her.

She's fucking with my head.

"Get dressed," I snap and then charge out of the tent before she can see my erection.

When I hear sniffling, I ignore it before I do anything more stupid than I've already done, like go back to her and console her.

There needs to be boundaries.

Now.

It's been five days since we tumbled off the side of the cliff. Devon can't walk yet, her ankle still too weak, so I have her do tasks she can manage while sitting. Sorting through piles of collected stuff. Meal prep. Inventory.

Meanwhile, I have been obsessing over building us a home. The tents are fine for the summer but I need to get some legitimate shelter in place before the winter gets here. My chainsaw survived the accident but I don't have much gas left for it. I'll have to reserve it for special uses. All of my other hand tools and nails were recovered though. It will take some hard, manual labor, but I'm going to build us a home if it's the last thing I do.

"I'm going to explore," I call out as I pick up my ax.

Devon lifts her blue eyes to meet mine and frowns. "Without me?" The hurt written all over her face is enough to crush me. Sure, I've been avoiding her as much as possible. She still clings to me like a spider monkey in the middle of the night, but so far we've managed to not have any touching mishaps. We haven't talked about what happened though. Eventually, I owe it to her as her father, to try and talk her through the confusing feelings she's having.

"You can't walk."

Fire flashes in her eyes and she stands. She's wrapped her ankle in one of her mom's old scarves to help support it. Her movements are slow but she hobbles my way, determination driving her forward. I can't help but smile at her.

"You going to bore me with useless information the whole time?" I ask as I grab a couple of water bottles I've recycled and toss them in my bag.

She rolls her eyes. "My useless information will save us one day. I'm going and you'll have to endure my chattering."

I hold my hand out to her and she clasps it with hers. Together we begin a slow trek through the wilderness. We walk for what feels like hours until Devon whimpers each time she puts pressure on her foot. The forest is thick in these parts, but I can still hear the river rushing by.

“A cave!” Devon shrieks, her voice reminding me of when she was small.

“Stay here,” I instruct. “Sit.”

She plops down on a fallen log and watches me as I explore the crevasse in the side of the mountain. When I peek my head in, I frown at seeing some bats. But other than that, the crack is about three feet wide and nine feet deep. Too small for bears and there isn’t any animal dung to indicate anything lives here. I reach in and touch the smooth stone surface. Cold. It would be a great escape this summer when it gets hot and perfect for storing things in the winter.

I survey the land outside the cave. It’s relatively flat and close to the river. The trees are plentiful here so I’d have plenty to work with and wouldn’t have to drag them very far. I grab a fallen limb and scare all the bats from the cave. Devon squeals from behind me and I laugh. Once I deem it safe, I saunter over to her and scoop her into my arms. Her smile is brilliant and full of love. This is the daughter I know. We can fix the little bit of damage we’ve done. I just know it. We’ll go back to the way things used to be.

I set her on the ledge of the small crevasse and grin at her. “What do you think?”

“It feels good,” she exclaims as she lies back on the cool stone floor. “Soooo good.”

I laugh and climb in next to her. There’s bat shit everywhere but neither of us care. It’s cold and refreshing this hot day. She grabs my hand and threads our fingers together.

“It’s kind of small but I love it.” Her gaze darkens. “Mostly I can’t see all the wreckage.”

“I like it too.” I lean forward and kiss her forehead. “I’m going to build us a house up against this crevasse.”

She beams at me and I vow right then I’m going to make her smile like this more every day. “Thank you.”

My heart clenches in my chest. “It’s my job to take care of you.”

Her palm touches my cheek and she gets that dreamy look in her eyes again. “I want to take care of you too.”

The spell is broken as shame creeps up my spine. “Let’s get back.” My tone is gruff as I pull my hand from her grip.

“Can we go swimming today?”

I regard her over my shoulder as I scoot out of the cave. “I don’t think it’s safe yet for you.”

She frowns. “I want to wash my hair.”

The very idea of bathing with her in the river has my hair standing on end. But it is my duty to make sure she bathes. I can’t keep her at arm’s length forever.

“Fine, but you’re not walking back.” I flash her a smile. “Piggy back?”

Her bright grin is back and it’s a motherfucking salve to my bleeding heart.

I shed my T-shirt and jeans but leave my boxers on. My gaze remains on the ground as I see her clothes drop on top of my pile. With a bar of soap in her hand and a bottle of shampoo in the other, she hobbles into the icy water.

“Shit! It’s cold!” she complains.

Laughing, I turn to watch her ease her way into the water. From behind, she doesn’t even look like my Devon. She’s only wearing a skimpy pair of pink panties. No shirt. Nothing. Her ass is too round, too fucking womanly. I’m glad she’ll die a damn virgin. She’ll be safe from dipshit college boys forever.

“Oh!” she cries out as she slips.

I lunge for her and hook her around the waist before she goes floating down the river. Ignoring the blood rushing down my body, I dip into the water with her in my arms.

“Do your washing. I’m not about to lose you too,” I grumble.

She lets out a sigh but sets to soaping her body down while I hold her shampoo bottle. Her skin is slippery but I don’t let her go. I find a place for us to sit. With her wedged between my legs and my arms gripped around

her, she’s not going anywhere. She wiggles and soon her pink panties are in her grip. My gaze is fixated on them as she scrubs them with the soap. When she finishes, she twists them around her wrist so they don’t float away.

“Do you want to wash?” Her words are breathy and soft.

“Not if I have to let you go.”

I wince at how those words could be misconstrued. She twists in my arms and settles on her knees in front of me. The water laps at her breasts, a distracting sound that I desperately try not to focus on.

“I’ll do it for you.”

My grip tightens around her. I close my eyes as she runs the bar of soap over my chest. When she moves her soapy palm down my abdomen and her fingertips brush against the waistband of my boxers, I growl.

“Devon.” It’s a warning.

She plays innocent and sets to washing my shoulders. When she finishes, we trade the soap for the shampoo.

“I have to get my hair wet,” she murmurs. Her legs wrap around my waist so she can hold on and she floats back in the water.

For one moment, I’m mesmerized. I can’t tear my gaze from her nipples that stick out of the water as she wets her hair. And what really fucks with my head is the fact she’s naked with her legs spread wide open right against my cock. As if I called it to action, I grow embarrassingly hard against her soft body.

“Devon, hurry,” I snap through gritted teeth.

“Okay,” she breathes as she scrubs at her hair.

I close my eyes and try to think about anything to make my erection go away. I’m surprised God hasn’t struck me down right here in the river.

“Let me wash yours,” she says, causing me to jerk my eyes open.

She’s clean and too damn pretty with the river water dripping from her dark lashes. I let out a groan but lean back to wet my hair. Once I sit back up, she squirts some shampoo in my hair and begins scrubbing. It feels good to be tended to. For so long Sabrina denied me something as simple as affection. Devon’s soft touches soothe my battered soul.

“Rinse,” she orders.

I smile and lean back. Her breasts press against me as she leans forward to help me get the soap out. It’s easy to confuse who we are in this moment.

With the sun baking down on us and the water rushing by, it's easy to pretend we're just a man and a woman in the wilderness.

She's sixteen.

And your daughter.

I sober up quickly and stand up with her in my arms. My dick is still rock hard. I'm sure she can feel it but neither of us speak of it. I carry my naked child to the river banks.

"Tonight we need to talk," I snap as I deposit her on her ass.

She yelps and stares up at me in confusion. "Am I in trouble, Daddy?"

I look up at the clear blue sky and pray to God for strength. This whole ordeal is too hard on my psyche. I'm cracking. Just like the hole in the side of the mountain. I'm widening and splitting right down the middle until the only thing that fits is she and I.

And that can't fucking happen.

Ever.

She watches me over the fire, fear dancing in her eyes. We've yet to discuss things but I'm waiting to get a little braver. And with one of the bottles of Jack I found on one of my scavenging hunts, the liquid courage is beginning to surge through me. I take another long pull on my bottle. She bites on her plump bottom lip and flashes me another worried look. Her hands busy themselves with braiding her long golden blonde hair.

She's so fucking pretty.

I close my eyes and shake my head.

Focus.

"That night should have never have happened. I need to apologize." My words are hoarse as I rip off the proverbial Band-Aid.

"Dad…"

"No," I snap. "We're discussing this." I scrub at my face and pin her with a hard glare. "I'm your father. Not your boyfriend." My words are mean and harsh and I instantly wish I could retract them.

Her full lips part open and tears well in her eyes. “I didn’t say that,” she whispers.

“But you’re thinking it. Whatever romantic notion is running through your head ends tonight. Are we clear?”

She swallows and nods. “I just…”

“No.”

“But…”

“No.”

“Dad…”

“Jesus Christ, Devon. I said fucking no. Do I need to whip your ass to get that through your thick goddamned skull?”

She jerks her head my way and glares at me. “I hate you.”

“Go to bed,” I snarl. “Get over your fucking self and go the fuck to sleep.”

Tears streak down her cheeks and she all but runs to the tent. I stay back and drink myself stupid. Hours ago I should have gone in and apologized to her but I don’t trust myself. Lines are blurred and fuck if it isn’t confusing for me too.

When I finally stumble back to the tent, she’s crying softly. Guilt surges up through me. I kick off my boots, undress down to my boxers, and fall into bed beside her. Her back is turned to me. It breaks my heart that I’ve done this to her. Crushed my sweet happy girl.

“Come here,” I order.

“No. I hate you.”

“Come here!” I bellow. “I’m fucking sorry, okay?”

I reach for her and she elbows me. Undeterred, I hook my arm around her waist and haul her to me. It’s fucking cold and she’ll freeze without my body heat. She struggles against my hold. When she turns toward me and slaps the shit out of me, I lose it. I grab her by the throat and pin her down.

“Calm the fuck down,” I growl.

I can’t see her in the dark but I can bet she’s glaring at me. Leaning forward, I kiss her forehead except it’s not her forehead, it’s her lips. Fat, swollen lips. I kiss them again. Her body relaxes and my grip on her throat falls away.

I want to taste her.

The thought disgusts me but I want it nonetheless.

“You confuse me,” she whispers, her breath hot against mine.

My palm slides up to cradle her soft face. “I don’t know what’s happening to us. Everything is tearing apart. I just want us to be the way we used to be.”

I press one more kiss to her mouth before falling on my back. I pull her over to me and lock her in my grip. She’s no longer trying to get away. We mold together like every night.

“I’m sorry, Pip.”

“Me too, Dad.”

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CHAPTER SIX

devon

I can handle a lot of things in the wilderness but my period is one that kills me. We've been here for two months. Each time I get my cycle, I am miserable to the point I want to die. Sure, I have a small supply of tampons but I'm bloated and uncomfortable and bitchy as hell. Plus, it's almost August and unbearably hot during the day. I spend more time in the cave than anywhere else during shark week.

My hormones are also out of control.

I sit up on my elbows and watch Dad work on our new home. He's downed twenty-six trees. I've watched him over the weeks bulk up from the manual labor and I can't stop staring at him. He walks around shirtless with his jeans low on his hips revealing muscles that seem to point right to his cock and it drives me mental.

Ever since the night we fought, I've tried hard to go back to the way things were. Dad has tried even harder. But we're strained. It's in the back of both our minds, I know this without doubt, but we both ignore it. And at night, we cuddle like two related people shouldn't.

I crave him.

Badly.

More so than chocolate or any other thing I no longer have access to.

I don't want any of it.

I want him.

I want to run my fingers through his thick beard and kiss his perfect lips.

Shame causes my skin to heat up and I grab my water bottle in irritation. My belly growls and I wonder if I should scavenge for some berries. They are plentiful and I'm trying to figure out a way to preserve

them for the winter. Dad has built some traps to save his ammunition. We've feasted on squirrels and rabbit. Aside from the forbidden tension between us, life is kind of nice. Sometimes late at night we talk about how much we miss Mom and Drew and Buddy, but mostly we just hold each other and find solace in the only other person on this earth we have left.

"I think I'll make the door face east. Once we get the cabin erected, I'm going to start cutting off metal from the RV to use for the roof," he says as he hefts his ax in a log. He lifts his muscular arm to swipe sweat from his brow. His bicep bulges and his abs flex.

Oh, God.

My entire body feels as though it's buzzing with electricity. I have no way to expel the energy.

"Sounds good," I tell him absently. My gaze falls to his butt when he bends over to pick the ax back up. The boys in my old neighborhood never looked this good. Strong. Muscular. Sweaty.

I'm going to combust.

I peel off my tank and lie back on the cool stone. It works wonders to cool me off.

"Put your shirt back on," Dad says, his voice close.

I shield my eyes from the sun to find him standing right in front of the cave opening. His gaze shamelessly rakes down my bare chest.

"I'm hot," I pout.

His jaw clenches and he tears his gaze away. "I need you to check the traps near camp. Skin anything we catch. I'm going to work on clearing the brush for the foundation a little more. Soon I can start on the frame."

I sit up on my elbows again. My breasts are swollen since I'm on my period and I'm happy they're a little bigger than usual. His gaze falls on them again. When he licks his lips before turning away, my heart flutters in my chest.

"Shirt. On. Now."

Rolling my eyes, I pull the shirt back on before climbing out of the cave. I stomp back to camp. I've only made it a few hundred yards away when I realize I forgot my knife. With a huff, I turn on my heel and head back. Dad is nowhere to be found. When I approach the cave, he's lying inside with his legs dangling out. His jeans have been pushed down his muscular thighs. My jaw drops to see that he's fisting his thick cock. I'm

enthralled by the way his veins on his tanned forearm bulge with each time he jerks at it.

It's the hottest thing I've ever seen.

He fists it harder and harder until he groans in pleasure. When my name is whispered from his lips, I freeze fearing I've been caught watching. Then I become mesmerized at the thick ropy cum that shoots up his bare hardened abs. He starts to sit up and I run.

This must be hell.

Hot and miserable.

Teased with what you'll never be able to have.

Anytime Dad sends me away to run errands for him, I always sneak back to see if he touches himself. Often, he goes back to work. Sometimes, though, he yanks his cock out and whacks off until his release is spent. I feel dirty watching him but I can't help it. He's my addiction. We're well into September now and our warm days are behind us. The nights are too cold. We spend far too much time snuggled together for body heat.

"We can always add on," Dad says, his hands on his narrow hips.

I walk around our cabin that doesn't have a roof yet. I love that it's pressed against the side of the mountain and we can keep our cave. "Seems plenty big enough to me. My favorite part is the porch."

He winks at me and saunters into the structure. "I'm going to make us matching chairs and a little table so we can sit out here and eat breakfast each morning."

"I can't wait."

His gaze stalls on my lips so I lick them. I find myself desperate to drive him as crazy as he makes me.

"Get back to work," he barks out and gives me a playful swat on my bottom.

I roll my eyes at him despite the fire raging within me and set to scraping the bark off the inside of the cabin walls. I'm distracted though when he starts cutting wood he plans to use on the roof. Muscles upon

muscles. Dad never had those before. I mean, he was cut and lean but I never knew he could look like this.

“Take a picture, it’ll last longer,” he teases.

Heat flashes across my skin. Is he flirting with me?

“You look sweaty. Maybe we should go swim and I’ll wash you.” I quirk up an eyebrow in challenge.

“Bad girl,” he mutters before going back to his project.

I grin because I feel like I won this round.

Today is moving day. It’s freezing and I’m tired but our cabin is ready. I’m dying to get out of the tent. And yet here I am, curled under the blankets dreading all the hard work ahead of us today.

“Pip,” Dad chirps as he unzips the tent and sits on his knees beside me. His grin is infectious. “I have a surprise for you.”

I sit up and rub sleep out of my eyes. “Show me.”

His laugh is warm and rich. It heats me from the inside out. “Come on, pretty girl.”

I melt under his flirtatious compliment and accept his outstretched hand. Once I’m dressed, we walk hand in hand to our new home. As soon as it comes into view, my heart swells. We built it together. Dad did all the heavy lifting but he let me help a lot. I’m proud of it.

Tears well in my eyes. It’s constructed with pride. Dad didn’t cut any corners. The porch is a lovely touch and our table and chairs are perfect. The roof had given him hell but he made it work. It’s pitched with logs but he used the metal from the RV to fashion a roof that should remain leak free. The extra pieces of metal, he lined the inside of our cabin for insulation against the cold. Together, we’d taken apart one of the bench seats in the RV and made a couch for our living space. The cabin is spacious. There’s a bedroom, a living room, and a small kitchen area. It’s perfect.

“Close your eyes,” he murmurs as he tugs me closer to our home.

I close them and let him guide me up the steps onto the porch. He pushes open the fancy door he made and we step inside. It's warmer than the chilly air outside and I smile. I'm scooped into his arms and I squeal. When he tosses me, I cry out and then gasp when I land on a soft surface.

A bed.

He told me the mattress was ruined inside the RV, yet here it is with my favorite quilt spread over the top.

I burst into tears.

"Shhh," he coos and sits beside me on the bed. I'm pulled into his warm arms. "I thought you'd like it, sweetheart."

I sob but look up at him. "I love it, Dad."

His brown eyes light up and he leans forward. When his lips brush against mine, I nearly melt. He pulls away and smiles. "Happy birthday, Devon."

I blink at him in confusion. "It's my birthday?"

"I've kept up with the calendar. You're seventeen now."

"I feel forty," I joke.

He strokes my hair out of my face and regards me with a tender expression. "You've grown into a beautiful woman."

Heat coils in my belly like a snake. "Thank you." I blush under his intense stare. Eventually, he breaks our gaze and stands.

"Let's move in. I'm ready to start preparing for winter and settling in."

"Me too."

Since it's cold outside, we curl up on the sofa and enjoy our new space. Our first night at our home and my birthday.

"The legal drinking age is twenty-one but I'm pretty sure I'll have burned through all the alcohol leftover before then. If you have any chance of crossing this off your life bucket list, we better do it soon. And what better time than your birthday?"

He pours some liquor into a coffee mug that survived the crash. I pull it up to my nose and crinkle it up in disgust.

“Ew. How do you drink this?”

“It’ll put hair on your chest, that’s for damn sure.”

I laugh and shake my head. “I’m not sure if I want hair on my chest. I kind of like it the way it is.”

His gaze darkens. “Just drink, Pip.”

The first swallow feels as though I’ve swallowed fire. It burns me from the inside out. I cough and glare at him. “Gross!” But then heat spreads through my chilled bones and I decide I like that warm feeling. “Fine. I’ll drink it but only because it warms me up.”

“I promise I’ll always keep you warm,” he murmurs. His pinky hooks with mine and we leave them conjoined.

We grow quiet as we drink and the sun sets, leaving us in the darkness. Each of us are lost in our own thoughts. Mine are of the dirty variety. I have no idea what he’s thinking. I can’t read him like I used to before this trip. A storm always brews in his eyes. As if he’s battling a war within myself. I wish he could find peace.

“I think that’s enough for one night,” he grunts, taking my now empty mug from me.

I whine but he simply chuckles at me. When I attempt to stand, I stumble. Lightning quick, he rises and steadies me with his hands on my hips. The jeans and hoodie feel like too much.

“Time for bed, Pip.”

I peel off my hoodie and shirt. It takes longer to remove my jeans. I climb under our mountain of covers now that we’ve taken them from both the tent and the RV.

“Are you coming to bed?” I ask as I stretch out. I don’t know how he wrangled the mattress all the way here by himself but I’m in heaven.

His belt jangles and my ears perk up as his clothes hit the cabin floor. When the mattress sinks with his weight, my heart rate spikes. I wrap my nearly naked body around his and let out a contented sigh.

“Did you have a good birthday?” he murmurs.

“It was the best. I wanted this one little thing though.” My voice is a whisper but I’m dead set on saying it. The liquor encourages me.

“What’s that?”

I tilt my head up and run my fingers through his wiry beard. Our hot breaths co-mingle, spicy from the alcohol. “A kiss.”

He laughs. “I kiss you all the time.”

I run my thumb over his bottom lip. “A real one.”

Dad doesn’t answer. Rejection makes me nauseous.

“I’ll never get to kiss a boy for the first time. I’ll never go to college. I’ll never have a normal life. I just thought—”

I’m silenced when his hot mouth presses to mine. Soft. So soft. My heart is pattering in my chest and it feels as though butterflies dance in my belly. His strong hand grips my jaw and he pulls down so that my mouth parts open. I let out a surprised moan when his warm tongue brushes against mine. It feels weird but I like it. He starts to pull away but I’m not done. I thread my fingers in his long brown hair that hangs in his eyes lately when we go too far between haircuts. I grip him and urge him to keep kissing me. With a groan, he gives in.

We kiss like this for what feels like hours.

I want his mouth all over me but I settle for it on mine for now.

His cock is hard against my thigh. I’m trying to summon up the courage to touch him through his boxers but keep falling short.

“Devon,” he rasps against my mouth. “That’s enough. You got your birthday wish. Time for bed.” Guilt laces his tone.

I don’t want him to feel guilty. It’s just the two of us. Nobody is judging us.

“Please,” I beg as I try to kiss him again.

He turns his head away as he rolls onto his back. “No. Bed. Now.”

I’m not afraid of his fatherly authoritative tone. Tapping into my bravery, I reach down and grip his erection through his boxers. I expect him to let me stroke him like he does himself.

“FUCK!” he snarls. “What the fuck, Devon?!”

He shoves me away from him and my pride is instantly crushed. Undeterred, I reach for him again. I shriek when he grabs my arm and drags me across his lap. His cock pokes painfully into my ribs as he rips my panties down my thighs.

“What—” My words give way to a scream when he spanks me. I try to scramble away, but he pins me in his strong grip.

Smack! Smack! Smack!

I sob and wiggle—anything to escape him spanking me. I haven’t been spanked since I was ten years old.

Smack! Smack! Smack!

He spanks me so hard that I know I'll be bruised. Over and over again until I throw up all over our new floor. I'm tossed into the floor as he stands and stalks out of the cabin in nothing but his boxer shorts.

Confused and hurt, I crawl into the bed and bawl my eyes out until I pass out.

I've never felt so alone in my entire life.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

reed

I could write an entire book on all the wrongdoings I'm guilty of since we made the trip to Alaska. Every single sin was committed against *her*. My girl. The only person I have left in this world. The one I love with my entire soul.

She won't speak to me.

She won't eat.

All damn day, she sleeps in our bed. Just like her fucking mother.

It kills me.

I shouldn't have kissed her. Fueled by the liquor, I gave in to the sinful urges. Her lips were sweet and perfect. I wanted to do it all night. But then she sent me over the edge. Touched my cock and drove me mad. I lost my fucking head and beat my daughter.

It's not her fault. She's young and confused. Fuck, I'm old and confused. I don't understand how to navigate this new world where we're the only people in it.

"You need to get out of bed today," I bark out from the doorway.

She doesn't flinch. With a sigh, I close up the cabin. I want to present her with another gift I scavenged but something tells me she won't care. Lighting a candle that I'd found in one of the boxes, I set it down on the end table I made beside the bed. The glow flickers off the walls. My gaze falls to her blonde hair that's spread out over her pillow. She's wearing one of my sweatshirts and I decide I like the way it looks on her.

"Pip?"

I shed my shirt and jeans before climbing into bed. When I curl up against her, she pretends to sleep. I miss her voice. Her smiles. The fucking light that radiates from her.

“I’m sorry,” I murmur for the thousandth time since I spanked her a week ago. “Please forgive me.”

I’m so lonely. It’s as if I’m in hell without her. She’s here but she’s not. I fucking hate it. I’m craving her hot skin against mine. The need is overwhelming. My lips find her neck just below her ear and I kiss her softly. I want to bring her back to me. Her body responds to the simple touch and it lights a fire inside of me. I slide my palm to her hip and then turn off my brain as I slip it up her flat stomach before stopping to cup her small tit. Her breath hitches.

“It’s cold,” I murmur. “We need body heat.”

The wind chooses that moment to howl outside as if to plead my case for me. She sits up and peels off the sweatshirt. Then, she pushes down her yoga pants. With more bare skin available to me, I kiss along her neck to her shoulder. I pull her onto her back and continue my kissing along her collarbone.

“Tell me to stop, baby. My head is all fucked up right now because I missed you so goddamned much.” My hot breath against her sensitive flesh makes her shudder. “I want to do things no father should ever do with his daughter.”

“Kiss me,” she pleads. “I missed you too.”

I don’t wait another second before I devour her pouty lips. She moans against my mouth, her tongue just as greedy for me as I am for her. We kiss desperately. I pinch her nipple and then soothe out the pain with gentle touches.

“Dad…”

I close my eyes. “Call me Reed in our new house. It fucks with my head too much if you don’t.”

Her fingers thread into my hair. “Reed. I want to touch you.”

I nod against her lips. She slides her palm down my tight abs and plunges her hand into my boxers. When she grips my aching cock, I nearly come right then. My breath hisses against her mouth. For someone with zero experience, she strokes my cock like a pro. I nearly black out from the intense pleasure. When I think I might come in her hand, I grab her wrist and pin it to the mattress.

“No.”

Heartbreak flashes across her features. The flickering candle light makes her seem so fucking sad.

“No, baby.” I kiss her mouth. “I just…I’ll come and I’m not ready yet.”

Her body relaxes and we start to make out again.

“Can I kiss you here?” I squeeze her perky tit.

“Y-Yes.”

She lets out a low moan when my mouth finds her nipple. I suck on the tender flesh softly at first. Then, I nip at her with my teeth. She tastes good enough to eat. When I’m sure I’ve given equal attention to each of her tits, I lift up and give them a break. Her eyes are hooded as she regards me with a sultry look—a look I’ve never seen before but it speaks to the animal inside of me. I want to see this look more often.

“I know you touch yourself,” I murmur, my eyes locked on hers. “How often?”

She chews on her bottom lip. “Sometimes when you fall asleep.”

“Does it feel good?”

“I wish it were you instead.”

My dick throbs in my boxers. “Do you want me to touch you there?”

She nods. “Please.”

I kiss down her stomach until I reach the top of her pale pink panties. I press a long kiss to her clit through the fabric and inhale her sweetness. She lets out a soft moan when I sit up and urge her panties down her thighs. After I toss them aside, I clutch her knees and pry them apart. Her pink pussy glistens with arousal. Since she’s a blonde, the hair is practically non-existent there and it’s almost as though she’s shaved. It turns me on so fucking badly.

I run my finger along her slit and revel in the way she jolts in pleasure. I’m going to blow her fucking mind. With our eyes locked together, I ease a finger in her tight channel. It’s been months since I’ve been laid. My dick practically sings with the prospect.

“I’m going to kiss you there.” My finger slides in and out of her wet pussy making obscene slurping sounds that set my blood on fire.

“Please do it, Reed.”

I flash her a wide grin, silently thanking her for keeping me in this moment. When I lean forward and my breath tickles her, she moans loudly. Slowly at first, I start tonguing her clit. She cries out in pleasure, her fingers latching on to my hair. It’s been seven years at least since I last did it. Once Drew died, Sabrina wouldn’t let me pleasure her anymore. I worry I’ll be out of practice but Devon has no complaints.

“Oh, God,” she whimpers. “This is intense.”

I’ll show her intense.

I suck on her clit while curling my finger up inside her. My fingertip rubs against her G-spot causing her to make a choking sound. When I introduce my teeth to her clit, she cries out. Her pussy clenches around my finger. She’s close. I attack her pussy with everything I’ve got. My mouth sucks and bites and licks her until she’s screaming in pleasure. Her body shudders for a good thirty seconds before she calms. When I slide my finger out and lift up to look at her, her eyes are wild.

“I need…”

“More?” I quip with a lifted brow.

She nods. I’m glad she’s my partner in crime here. If I think about all the wrong we’re doing, I’ll flip the fuck out. So instead, I just focus on the girl I love.

“I want to make love to you,” I tell her, my voice raw. “But it’s a big deal, Devon.”

She frowns. “I want it. I want you. I’m too lonely without you. I don’t like when anything stands between us.”

I clench my jaw. “It’s going to hurt, baby.”

“Like the day you spanked me until I threw up?” she challenges. “I think I can handle it.”

A growl rumbles from me and I pounce on her. My dick strains against my boxers as I dry hump her. She’s so wet she soaks my underwear. Our mouths meet and it’s easy to get caught up in our love.

“Please,” she begs. “Reed, I want you inside of me.”

Her words drive me right over the edge of sanity. I reach between us to shove my boxers down and pull out my aching dick. When I tease her slick opening, she whimpers. At this point, if she told me no, I’m not sure I could stop. I’m so far gone into the deep end.

But because I love her, I give her one more chance.

“Tell me to stop. It’s not too late. All of this can end now, baby.”

“I don’t want it to ever end.”

Her words snap the last thread of control I had. Not so gently, I push my thickness into her tight virgin pussy. She squeals in pain but it’s going to hurt no matter what. Doing it quick is the best thing for her. I buck my hips hard against her, destroying the last of her innocence. Her scream is

otherworldly. I don’t think she realizes she’s clawing the shit out of my shoulders.

“Baby…” I kiss her mouth but don’t move.

She starts to cry. “T-That hurt.”

I stroke her hair away from her sweaty face and kiss her soft lips. My dick is about to explode with the need to come but I don’t dare move. She’s upset and I don’t want this to feel like rape or some shit. I want her to enjoy it as much as I do.

“You’re my pretty, brave, smart girl,” I coo, my lips worshipping hers. “I lose my head around you and I don’t even care anymore. I just love you in a way I can’t even begin to describe.”

Her body relaxes beneath me. Our mouths mate. Nipping and sucking. Desperation in a kiss. After several minutes, she starts wiggling. I know when my girl wiggles it means she wants me. Slowly, I start sliding in and out of her. I kiss her hard while I find her clit with my free hand. She lets out a moan when I massage her sensitive place.

“You’re perfect,” I praise. “So fucking perfect.”

“Oh God,” she cries out, her body getting snatched by a fierce, sudden orgasm. Because she’s so tight, her body constricts around my dick in a way that nearly blinds me. I’m spilling inside of her before I can even stop myself. I thank God she just finished her period. Otherwise, I’d probably knock her up or some shit. I’ll have to get a handle on this for next time.

Next time.

I’m still fantasizing about that when my cock finally drains the last of my orgasm. I nuzzle my nose against hers. “That was better than I could have imagined.”

“Really?”

“Was it okay for you?” I ask, a half grin tugging at my lips.

She nods. “It was mind-blowing.”

I slide out of her body gently as not to hurt her sore insides and then tug her against me. I turn my head and blow out the candle, shrouding us in darkness.

“I love you,” she breathes, her grip tightening around me.

She sounds so fucking happy. All it took was to plunge into sin with her. I’m sure this will all feel different in the morning but for right now, I’m going to enjoy it.

I love this girl.

She’s mine in every sense of the word.

And no matter what happens, I’ll never let her go.

I wake up colder than fuck. Devon feels like ice burrowed against me. We’re still naked. I clench my jaw as reality sets in.

I fucked my daughter.

Jesus.

Guilt infects me.

Out here in the wilderness, my mind is slipping. I’m not millionaire Reed Jamison, global real estate mogul. I’m not husband and father.

I’m just a man.

Brutal and savage.

An animal.

I take what I want. Last night, I took her. My sweet, beautiful Devon. It’s as though someone shoves a straw into my chest and sucks my heart out. I’m hollowed and empty. Full of regret. Hate festers deep inside of me.

But I don’t know how to turn off the animal side of me. Even as I nearly choke on self-loathing, I’m stroking her soft blonde hair. Pressing my lips to her head. I can’t be two people. I don’t know how.

I want her with every ounce of my being.

When I just think about her and me out here alone, it all makes perfect sense. A taboo fantasy come to life. When I allow my real world self to dwell on what I’ve done, I can’t help but consider how this would look to an outsider. Back in California, the police would be banging my door down. Not only did I sleep with an underage girl, but she’s *my* girl.

They’d scream incest.

It would be a media sensation.

Real Estate Tycoon Corrupts His Young Teenage Daughter.

Bile creeps up in my throat. If Sabrina were here to know what I’ve done, I’m sure she’d try and kill me. Her children were her everything—even if she did abandon one to perpetually mourn the other.

“Good morning, Reed,” Devon says, her voice breathy and sleepy.

And just like that, my animal rips off the head of the old man inside of me. The animal within moves his hand to cup her breast and nuzzles his nose against her hair, inhaling her sweet scent.

“Morning, beautiful.”

She lets out a contented sigh. My head may be a fucked-up mess right now but she calms those thoughts. “It’s cold out today.”

Our mouths meet and we kiss. Soft. Simple.

“I’m going to make us a wood burning fireplace to heat our cabin,” I tell her. “There’s plenty of metal leftover. I think I can use the oven from the RV and use the muffler to ventilate the smoke out of the cabin. I’m not going to promise it’ll work but I want to try.”

She grins up at me. “That would be wonderful. This cold is the worst.”

“Devon…”

Her brows crinkle together. “Yeah?”

“What happened last night…” I swallow and tear my gaze from her adoring one. “You know this isn’t right.”

She clutches my cheek and turns my head to look at her. “It felt pretty right to me.”

I clench my jaw. Getting lost in her stare is easy. She looks at me as though I’m everything she’s ever wanted out of life. “It’s illegal.”

A small chuckle escapes her. “Maybe you should turn yourself in.”

“Smartass,” I growl and tickle her ribs.

She squeals and then we’re wrestling in our bed. I tickle, she screams. This goes on until the blankets are kicked to the floor and I have her pinned by her wrists to the bed. I fixate on her crimson cheeks and parted pouty lips. We stare at each other. She’s different from the way she was back in California.

Wild.

Free.

Uncaring of consequences.

Oh, to be young.

“Are you still sore from last night? My question comes out as a rasp.

She nods. “But I like the sting.”

My dick thumps against her flesh. Triumph glitters in her brilliant blues.

“I want to watch as you slide inside of me,” she breathes.

I close my eyes. She’s learning how to drive me straight into madness. Easily. With few words. She makes them count.

“Baby…”

She lifts her hips and wiggles her thighs. Like the brainwashed bastard I am, I allow her to slide her legs out so she can wrap them around my waist. My dick is throbbing against her soft pubic hair. I’m aching to slide inside of her but my brain is still at war this morning.

“Just rub it against me,” she says coyly. A wicked gleam dances in her blues.

And because I’m finding it increasingly difficult to deny her a thing, I grip her wrists tighter and start rubbing myself against her sensitive pussy. She whimpers and moans and fucking begs. I have to close my eyes because she’s so goddamn hot I feel like I’ll nut all over her just from looking at the way her lips move to say my name.

“Fuck me, Reed,” she orders, her tone bossy as hell.

I snap my eyes open and glare at her. “Don’t say words like that. Your mouth is too pretty to let dirty things like that come out of it.”

She licks her pink lips and taunts me more. “You could always put something in it to shut me up.”

Her words have me going mental. I start rutting against her, rubbing the outside of her pussy raw with my stone-hard dick. She whimpers and pleads for more.

“I want your big cock inside of me. I like the way you stretch me and fill me with you. It feels good. It feels like I’m whole. Fuck me. Fuck me. Fuuuuuck—”

She doesn’t get to finish her words because I slam into her so hard she screams at the top of her lungs. Her hands struggle beneath my grip but I hold her still as I fuck her like she wants. Nothing soft or gentle about this.

I’m an animal.

She fucking provoked the beast.

Her eyes are feral as she stares me down while I own her with my cock. I’m still not used to her tight little body because the need to come is overwhelming. I release one of her hands so I can grip her jaw.

“Make yourself come, Devon,” I growl. “I’m about to come all over your flat stomach but I want you to get off too. I can’t fucking wait any longer.”

She nods and forces her hand between us. I groan as she works herself up while I tear her still so pure body apart from the inside out. It’s only fair

as she’s the one who ripped my mind right from my skull and fucking fed on it.

With my fingers digging into her jaw, I lean forward and kiss her like a savage. As though I’m trying to eat her mouth. I bite her. I make her cry out. I taste blood. She’s killing the man that I’ve grown to know and freeing the beast inside. When she comes with a jolt and bites my bottom lip, I explode. I should be pulling out but I’m too wrapped up in the way her body contracts around mine and the trembling of her orgasm seems to vibrate through my dick. My heat surges deep inside her. And when I spend the rest of my release, I collapse on her thin body.

Our hearts are hammering together as one.

She’s mine.

The only one who ever could reach inside me and free the wild.

We are one now.

More than family.

Everything.

“I love you,” she purrs, her lips kissing the top of my head.

I love her more than words can fucking express. I don’t understand this love. It’s some brutal smash of history and past ground into raw, feral need. It’s man and woman with the connection of two best friends bound together by tragedy. It’s confusing as fuck and I don’t even want to try to comprehend it.

I just want it.

I just fucking want it.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

devon

I follow behind Dad—er, Reed—as he carries the heavy oven from the RV. The reason it was so cold last night is that we had our first heavy snow. We've bundled up but the wind is brutal. We need this to work desperately. As we walk, my mind drifts to last night and earlier this morning.

We had sex.

Last night we made love and this morning we fucked.

There is a huge difference and I love them both equally.

But dear God am I sore. While he worked on pulling the oven out of the RV earlier, I packed some snow in my glove and held it against my sore sex.

"If we get this thing made, I want to make some stew," I tell him as we trudge along.

He looks over his shoulder and grins at me. It effectively chases the chill from my bones, replacing it with heat. "Rabbit?"

"And before it snowed, I found some edible plants that I put away in the cave."

"Sounds good, baby."

My cheeks warm at the endearment. He calls me baby more and I don't think it has anything to do with me being his daughter. Back when things were good, he used to call Mom "baby." It's how he shows affection for the woman he loves.

He loves me.

I swear my heart flutters in my chest like a bird in a cage. I don't want to free it. I love how it goes crazy inside my rib cage any time he looks my way, smiles, or touches me. He owns that little bird and I'll be damned if I let it go.

Once inside our cabin, he gets to work. I try to assist but he's happy doing all the grunt work himself. And then I get a show when he gets hot and strips down to his jeans. My sex stays wet because I can't stop thinking about him pressed against me and inside of me.

"I'm going to go scavenge since you don't need my help," I tell him, my voice breathy. Really, I just want to cool off before I get too weird and start touching myself on the bed while he works. He grunts his approval but doesn't look up at me. I run my fingers through his sweaty hair before slipping out of the cabin.

On the way back to our old campsite, I wonder where I'll look this time. He's picked a lot of the RV apart to use for stuff but there are still parts inside of the mangled covered trailer that we haven't been able to get to. I'm sure there are things we could use if we could just get access.

I'm smiling when I hear it.

Snorting.

Loud and feral.

And so close.

When I look up, I'm staring down the path at a giant grizzly twice my height not a hundred yards away. He has to weigh six hundred pounds easily. All the crap I learned from the brochure flies out the window. It's hard to remember the rules when you're staring down a beast with claws as long as your hand.

I take a step back and the crunch of my boot has the bear jerking his head toward the sound. A guttural growl rumbles from its chest as it rises to its full height. It makes a sound that echoes off the trees and chills my bones.

Please go away.

It growls again before falling back down to all four paws. I stay incredibly still hoping it will turn and walk away.

But it doesn't.

It trots toward me, not a full run but certainly in a hurry, and all I can think of to do is screech. "Daddy!"

As soon as it nears, I crumple to the earth and roll into a ball protecting my neck with my hands. A heavy paw swats at my back and the fabric of my coat rips. My heart is sputtering in my chest and I'm afraid it will give out. The bear seems to grab at my side and his claws puncture my coat poking right through my flesh. A gut-wrenching scream escapes me.

And then I mentally check out.

“When I grow up, I’m going to be just like Dad,” Drew tells me, a wide smile on his lips.

“Me too.”

He snorts and throws a twig at me. “You can’t be like Dad. You’re a girl. You have to be like Mom.”

I frown. I don’t want to be like Mom. She’s quiet and sleeps a lot. When she’s happy and smiling, she’s pretty. But when she’s sad, she ignores all of us. One time I asked Dad what she’s so sad about. He told me life. I didn’t get it. I still don’t get it.

“I don’t care. I’m going to be like Dad. He’s strong and funny and is good at cheering us up,” I tell my twin brother with a huff.

“But you have boobs,” he argues.

I gape at him in horror and cross my arms over my chest. “I do not,” I grumble.

“Do too.”

“Do not.”

He reaches up into the tree to break off another twig. When Dad is working and Mom is sleeping, Drew and I like to hang out in our treehouse.

“You’re mean,” I say, my lip pouting out.

He grins at me, his blue eyes twinkling. “I’m just kidding. I’d rather be like Dad if I were you too.” His features fall and he stares at me sadly. “Does Mom not like us?”

I scrunch my nose up. “She loves us.”

He blinks and reaches up to grab at another twig. “There’s a difference, Dev. She loves us because she has to. But she doesn’t like us like Dad does. She doesn’t play with us.”

I don’t like talking about it so I change the subject. “Want to go ride bikes?”

He grins at me with his hand reaching up. “Yeah—ow!”

His hand jerks down and he inspects his wrist. “I stabbed myself on a stick!”

Laughing, I stand and hold my hand out to him. “That’s what you get for destroying Mother Nature’s pretty tree.”

“It’s hot,” he complains and ignores my offered hand. “We’ll go in a minute.”

With a frown, I plop back down and pick up my book. He curls up on his side. We both grow quiet for some time as I read and he rests.

“What book are you reading?” His voice is a whisper as he lies on one cheek and stares at me with droopy lids.

“The Boxcar Children. They are homeless and live in a boxcar. I like how they scavenge for things and take care of each other.”

“Devon,” he rasps out. “I don’t feel so good.”

His skin is pale and he’s sweating.

“Get up and we’ll go back inside.”

He closes his eyes. “I…”

“Drew?”

I toss my book down and crawl over to him.

“Drew?!”

Everything happens so fast. One minute he’s fine. The next he’s sleepy and pale.

“Are you sick?” I demand, clutching his hand. I frown when my palm touches something wet. When I look at his wrist, I don’t think it looks like he was stabbed at all. It appears to be a snake bite.

A quick glance into the tree Drew had been messing with, and I see it wrapped around the branch.

I scream. I scream at the top of my lungs because I’m afraid it is going to bite me too. Letting go of my brother, I scramble to the hatch and hurry down the ladder to go find Dad. Guilt consumes me because I left him up there with it.

With tears streaming down my face, I scream again.

Pop!

I'm dragged from my horrible memories of the day we lost my brother by the sound of a gun shot. I'm no longer in the hot treehouse but instead curled into a ball in the cold snow.

The animal grunts but it crunches away from me, a roar escaping it.

"Devon!"

I start sobbing and sit up on my knees. I watch in horror as the bear runs full speed toward my dad.

Pop!

Pop!

Pop!

He's holding out a handgun and unloading in the bear. Each hit makes the bear stagger. It's moving so quickly still though. And when it lunges at my father who is wearing nothing but jeans since he ran straight from the cabin, I scream.

A disturbing cracking sound has bile rising in my throat. I'm going to be sick. The bear is on top of my dad. I scramble toward him, ignoring the searing pain from where the bear's claws got me, and look for a big stick to hurt the grizzly with so he'll get off my dad. When I approach, I can see Dad attempting to move but the bear is too heavy. At least the bear isn't moving though. Blood is everywhere and I pray it belongs to the grizzly.

"H-Help m-me get th-this th-thing off m-me," Dad rasps.

I grab onto the bear's massive arm and start pulling. Tears stream down my face as I exert all my strength to pull the bear.

"He's too heavy!" My voice is shrill and panicked.

Dad doesn't respond.

Oh, God.

What if the bear bit him? What if he's bleeding out as we speak?

I abandon the bear and find Dad's leg. With all of my strength, I tug on his leg. Over and over. He moves little by little but it's better than nothing. My entire body is trembling from the cold and fear but I can't leave him under that thing. I can't be alone. I can't. I need him. Eventually, I free him with one last hard yank. I go flying back and hit my head hard on a tree trunk. It dazes me and I have to blink away the urge to sleep. When I crawl back over to Dad, he lies there with his eyes closed. He's covered in blood. A sick wheezing sound is coming from him.

"Daddy!"

His eyes crack open but he doesn’t say anything. Just reaches for my hand. I clutch onto it as I sob. It’s too cold out here for him to be in the snow shirtless and hurt. I have to get him back inside. When I stand and grab his arms, he lets out a raspy groan of pain. He’s injured and dragging him back to the cabin won’t work. I don’t want to hurt him worse. With a choked sob, I abandon him and run all the way back to the cabin. I rush inside and rip a piece of the metal RV sheeting from the wall. Then, I run back. Getting him on the metal is tricky and at one point, I slice my hand right open but adrenaline fuels me on. Once he’s secure on it, I start dragging the metal with him on top along the snow-covered path.

Twenty long minutes of this and I get him to the cabin steps. I can’t figure out a way to move him without hurting him. So with a deep breath, I grab him under the armpits and pull him up the steps. He moans in pain and it breaks my heart but I need to get him inside. I manage to pull him in and shut the door behind me to keep the elements out.

“I-I need to s-see where you’re hurt,” I chatter out. Blood drips from my hand as I rake my palm over him. His breathing scares me. It’s noisy and rattled. I attempt to calm down and assess him. Before this trip, I read up a lot on first aid. With the bear’s weight landing on top of him, there’s a good chance he broke some ribs. My stomach bottoms out. If one of those ribs punctured his lung, he’ll die out here.

Please, God, don’t let him die.

“I’m going to clean you up,” I tell him, my voice firmer than before. I can’t break apart. I need to keep my head about me so I can look after him. Running back outside, I poke at our fire and boil some water. Then, I fetch a recently cleaned rag and settle back beside him. Cleaning him will allow me to take stock of his injuries. Carefully, I wash him from head to toe. He has no actual cuts or bite marks that I can see which is good, but his awfully loud breathing means something happened inside of him which feels worse. I can’t see inside of him to fix him. Quickly, I clean up my own hand that hurts and pour some alcohol into the wound. Then, I use some gauze from the first aid kit to wrap it tightly. The pain on the side of my back from the bear’s claws niggle at me and needs cleaning but it can wait.

“Wake up,” I urge, my voice soft. “I need you to promise me everything will be okay.” Hot tears spill down my cheeks and splash on his chest.

He doesn’t speak but he does wiggle his pinky. I sob as I grab onto it. It’s a promise.

I wake with a start, groggy and confused. I'd managed to cover us with a quilt as I curled into his side. His breathing is still rattling and noisy. But when I look up he's staring at me.

"Reed!" I promised I'd call him by name in our cabin. I don't break my promises either.

He attempts to smile but then winces. It shatters my heart.

"Shhhh," I coo, my fingers running through his beard. "Let me take care of you. Can you sit up? I want to move you to the warm bed."

He nods.

Progress.

Pushing away the quilt, I straddle his waist careful not to hurt him. Then, I hook my arms under his armpits and struggle to stand. He's super heavy and is now cursing like a sailor in a hissed voice, but then his feet work with me and he goes up the rest of the way. The trip to the bed isn't far and I manage to get him situated on the soft mattress. The rattling sound is louder than ever and it scares me.

I set to bundling him up with covers. Then, I stroke his long hair from his eyes and kiss his mouth. "Tell me what hurts."

He groans. "I think I cracked my ribs."

My heart rate quickens. "Okay, so we can do this. Cracked ribs are better than the horrible scenarios running through my head. Those can get better with rest. Remember the time Drew cracked one of his when he fell out of the treehouse?"

His lips quirk up on one side at the mention of my brother. "Rowdy."

I smile too. "He was."

His eyes find mine. "Are you hurt?"

Lifting my bandaged hand, I nod. "The metal got me," I admit, shame in my tone. "I haven't looked at the bear's damage on my back yet."

"Take your coat off and let me see," he rasps.

With shaking from my cold fingers, I unbutton my coat and toss it away. My hoodie gets pulled off next. Dad lets out a sharp exhalation and then starts coughing. It sounds awful.

“Are you okay?” I ask over my shoulder.

His gaze is on my back and tears are in his eyes. “It hurts to breathe deep but I remember the doctor telling us to make sure Drew took deep breaths every hour when he was hurt. Help me remember.” His fingertips touch my spine. “Baby, your back is fucked up.”

I sit up straight and shake my head. “I’m fine.”

“You’re not fine. Go get the first aid kit. I think you need stitches.”

Reluctantly, I climb off the bed to hunt for it. Once I return, I soak a new rag in alcohol and hand it to him. He dabs at the wounds that most definitely do hurt. While he does that, I thread the needle. It takes forever but he manages to stitch me up.

“I’m so tired but there’s so much to do,” I tell him, my voice shaky with unshed tears.

“Rest, baby.”

I curl up next to him, my bare breasts pressed gently against the side of his arm. Leaning up, I kiss his mouth. Soft at first but then I kiss him desperately as though he might disappear at any moment. When he starts wheezing again, I whimper and pull away.

“Rest, baby,” he murmurs again.

With a choked sob, I obey.

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CHAPTER NINE

reed

Excruciating pain radiates across my ribs. Breathing is a sonofabitch but I can do this. I remember what the doctor had said when Drew cracked his rib. We were told he needed to breathe deeply—even though he cried every time—so he didn't develop pneumonia. And that is exactly what I do. I take deep breaths even though I prefer the shallow ones. I can't get worse out here. She needs me. The healing time on this shit is like six weeks. In the wilderness, I can't let her do everything by herself for that long.

When I look down at her sleeping face, my heart aches. She's so beautiful. Her dirty face is tear stained and puffy. Her wild, blonde mane is a mess. But she's as pretty as an angel sent just for me. I'll be damned if I ever leave her.

That bear pawing at her scared the ever-loving shit out of me. It was the same ear-piercing scream she used when we discovered her brother had been bitten by a venomous snake in the treehouse. Despite the rush to the hospital and the anti-venom, his heart stopped and my little boy died in the emergency room. When I saw the bear, I couldn't help but fear I'd lose her too. She wasn't moving and he was so fucking big. I pulled my .45 caliber pistol from my jeans that I keep on me at all times and unloaded. The minute that fucker crashed into me, I thought I was a goner.

But my girl…

My sweet, brave as shit girl, yanked me out from beneath that heavy ass bear. She was clever and managed to haul me back to the cabin. Then, she cleaned and took care of me.

The least I can do is pull the fuck out of this.

It's been three days since the incident. I've shown her how to chamber a bullet on the .45 and now she keeps it with her when she goes outside to do

chores. I feel like an invalid. She helps me piss and shit in a bucket since I can't move very well. She feeds me—literally spoon feeds me like a child—every meal. And she bathes me. I wish I had the strength to do more.

What surprises me the most is she skinned the bear and harvested the meat.

"This morning, we're having bad bear soup again," she says as she sits up, the quilt falling away from her naked body.

I reach forward and brush my fingertip across her nipple. It hardens under my touch and her cheeks blaze pink. I can't help but smile at her. "Bad bear soup is my favorite. Do you have to go yet?" I pinch her nipple and she lets out a gasp.

"I'd much rather lie in bed with you," she admits. "But no rest for the weary."

I slide my hand down to her panties and massage between her legs. "I miss touching you, baby."

She moans. "You shouldn't be moving. You're hurt."

"You could always straddle my face and let me kiss your pretty pussy."

Her mouth drops open. "You're dirty."

"You'd be the one making my face all messy," I smirk at her.

She slides her hand down to my erect cock and strokes it. "I could kiss yours too." Her words are breathy and embarrassed but it turns me the fuck on. Especially when she darts her tongue out and licks her full pink lips. I have a quick fantasy of those perfect lips wrapped around my dick.

"Let me kiss you first. Then you can have your turn," I concede, my dick jolting in her grip.

Her eyes twinkle. "I have a great idea. I'll let you put your mouth on me but I'll get on all fours backward and kiss you too. At the same time. It will feel like…" she trails off and blushes. "Like when we have sex."

I've fucked her twice and I'm dying for more. I don't tell her they have a name for her suggestion—sixty-nine—because I love keeping her as innocent as I can. She's mine. All of this is hers to discover on her own.

"That's a great idea, baby. Now sit on my face and let me taste you."

She lets out a low moan of embarrassment but sheds her panties. Then, carefully, she straddles my face. Her familiar musk sends desire shooting straight to my cock. Her round ass and pink pussy are right in my face as she assumes her position.

“Have you ever…” I trail off. I’m about to ask my daughter-turned-lover if she’s given head before. Thankfully she stops me.

“No, but I promise to make you feel good.”

I grip her fleshy bottom and run my tongue along her slit, enjoying the whimper she makes. “I had no doubts, baby.”

When I start eating out her delicious pussy, I groan the moment her tongue teases my tip. I can’t see what she’s doing but her tiny tastes and little licks are driving me insane with pleasure.

“Put your sexy mouth all the way around my dick. Fuck it, beautiful,” I instruct, my voice strained.

Like the good girl she is, she obeys and soon she’s sucking my cock with vigor. I devote my attention to sucking on her clit and fucking her tight hole with my thumb. Her body trembles above mine. I’m sure it’s awkward for her to maintain the position as not to hurt my ribs, but this girl has already proven to me she’s strong. Her body is small but she’s developed some sexy as fuck muscles since our crash. Slurps and moans from both our ends are enough to have my balls seizing up.

I’m trying to hold out until she comes. She’s close, based on the way she trembles. I slip my thumb from her pussy and probe the tight ring of her ass hole. She cries out when I start pushing inside of her.

“Oh God,” she garbles out around my cock. I’ve barely started fucking that hole when it clenches tight around me. She screams in pleasure. Her arousal from her cunt drips down into my face and I lap it up, greedy for every drop. When my dick hits the back of her throat and she relaxes it, I lose control. My cock throbs out my violent release and I nearly black out when she swallows me. She fucking swallows my dick. My orgasm shoots down the back of her throat that has me in a hot, tight grip. She eventually gags and pulls away from me, her slobber and some missed cum dripping down onto me.

“That was…” Her body trembles and clenches.

I ease my thumb out of her and press a kiss to the inside of her soaked thigh. “Perfect. That was perfect, baby. Now make us some food, woman,” I tease and slap her ass.

She squeals and scrambles off me. When she turns to regard me, I’m stunned speechless. I’ve never seen something so goddamned beautiful in all my life. Her hair is wild just like her blue eyes. Her mouth is puffy and

red and wet as fuck. Her tits are swollen and nipples are erect. Her pussy is bright red and soaked.

I wish I were well because I'd bend her over the mattress and take her rough if I were. I'd tangle my fists in her gorgeous mane and fuck her so hard from behind she'd scare away all the bears.

"You're hard again," she says, pointing at my relentless dick.

I grin at her. "As soon as I feel better we're going to do something about that."

Her eyes darken as she bites on her lip. "Pinky promise?"

"You better fucking believe it."

Three weeks have come and gone. I literally have cabin fever and it's driving me fucking crazy. At least once a day, my sweet Devon straddles me and we trade orgasms. It's the most amazing feeling but not satisfying enough. I want her. I want to sink my cock deep inside of her and come with her tight pussy clenching around me. Don't get me wrong, the girl is becoming a master at sucking my cock. I just want to be inside of her.

"Today, I'm making the fireplace. Just tell me what to do." She's all smiles as she dusts snow off her jacket.

I grumble in protest. "I can do it. Just get me my—"

"Reed," she says in exasperation. "No. I can do this."

Reluctantly, I concede. We spend hours as I walk her through constructing the fireplace. My girl is clever and so fucking smart. And capable. I watch in absolute awe as she builds this thing every bit as well as I could. Thank God my tools survived the crash. Without hammers and saws and nails and every other tool imaginable, we'd have had a lot harder time surviving out here.

"The most difficult part will be sealing those holes so smoke doesn't escape into the cabin," I say thoughtfully.

Undeterred, she hammers out metal to make v-shaped corners to fit in the gaps. She uses too many nails but she's making it pretty airtight. I don't

criticize her or tell her how to do it. Devon is smart and has a plan in her head.

Hours later, once she's cut a hole in the cabin so the muffler pipe can stick out that's also attached to the back of the oven-turned-fireplace, she dusts off her hands and grins at me. "Time to test it out."

She disappears but then comes back with some wood she no doubt chopped herself. I watch with pride as she makes a fire—just as I've taught her—inside the contraption. Once she's satisfied, she sits back and watches it. Amazingly, the damn thing works. Heat billows from the open oven door but all the smoke is flowing into the muffler pipe and outside.

"You're fucking brilliant," I praise.

She beams at me as she takes off her coat. "Now we can roast bad bear steaks right from our bed if we want. How romantic," she sighs playfully. God, she's so damn cute.

"I know of other ways we can be romantic…"

As if catching my drift, she begins a slow strip show that has my cock aching beneath the blanket. When she's fully naked, she crawls in bed beside me.

"Sit on my cock, Devon."

Her eyes widen. "But you're still hurt."

"My dick is perfectly fine," I argue.

Our eyes meet in challenge. I pin her with a glare that leaves no room for argument.

"Fine," she huffs, clearly not happy about it.

"It's no different than when you suck me off, baby. At least this time I can look at your pretty tits while you bounce on me."

My words turn her on because she gets that look in her eyes—the look that says she wants to fuck desperately.

Slowly, she straddles my thighs and takes my dick in her hand. Then, her eyes dart to mine. "I don't know how to do this."

"Just get on and ride."

She laughs but carefully guides my throbbing cock to her soaked pussy. With a gasp, she slides all the way down.

"Wow…"

"What?"

"It just feels bigger like this. Like it's poking stuff inside of me."

"Does it hurt?"

“No…just feels weird. I like it.” She bats her eyelashes at me.

“I’m going to touch your clit but I want to watch you play with your sexy tits,” I tell her as my fingers begin massaging her between her thighs.

She moans and nods. Her palms go to her breasts and she slowly slides up and down my shaft. At first, she’s rigid and clinical. But after a few moments, she loses her mind to the ecstasy. She bucks against me like a wild woman, greedy for release. Seeing her so free and lost to the pleasure has my nuts drawing up eager for release. To my horror, I begin spilling abruptly inside of her—before she orgasms. But thankfully, it seems to set her off because her pussy clenches hard around me with her release. Our bodies make slurping sounds as she continues to fuck me. When the last of my seed pours inside of her, I take a moment to stare at her while her eyes are still closed.

Serene.

Happy.

Mine.

“We need to be careful,” I tell her, making her eyes snap open. “The last thing we need out here is a baby.”

Her mouth parts. “Okay. How?”

“We just need to communicate. When I get ready to come, I’ll tell you. It’s called the pullout method,” I tell her with a smile.

As much as the idea of her with a rounded belly turns me on, I can’t fathom if something went wrong. She’s only seventeen and she’s tiny. All sorts of complications could arise from pregnancy and giving birth. In the old days, women died from childbirth all the time. And I’d go mental if I lost her over something stupid like that just because she feels too good wrapped around me when I come.

“The pullout method. Got it,” she assures me. “Now are you ready for some steak, Mr. Romantic?”

I tickle her sides. “Feed me, woman.”

She swats away my hands and lifts a challenging brow at me. “Woman? Are you a cave man now?”

Gesturing to the crevasse, I flash her a wolfish grin. “Technically yes. But I’ll make sure to fuck you in there soon just so we don’t have any confusion.”

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CHAPTER TEN

devon

It's been six weeks since the bear accident. Dad—*Reed*—is better. He walks around, chops wood, hunts, and does a million other chores. And then when we fall into bed at night, he relentlessly makes love to me. We're careful to always pull out, aside from the one or two accidents in the beginning.

I'm so thankful he's back to normal though because lately, I'm exhausted. Winter is harsher than I could have imagined. The wildlife is plentiful here but I'm dying for something besides meat. We try not to touch our canned foods we have from the RV and trailer but twice now I've begged—and offered sexual favors in exchange—for a can of fruit.

My stomach grumbles at the thought of more peaches.

When I roll over onto my stomach to silence my grumbling belly, I'm sad to see Dad is already out of bed and nowhere to be found. I get a whiff of the meat we've stored in the cave and it turns my stomach. Gagging, I clamber out of bed and grab the bucket just in time to expel my guts.

I'm sitting there feeling sorry for myself when a thought occurs to me.

I haven't started my period.

Counting backward, I realize I've gone nearly two months with no cycle.

Oh, God.

And I'm nauseous this morning.

Oh, God.

My boobs are sore and I'm incredibly fatigued.

Oh, God.

When I bring my palm to my stomach, I notice that it's slightly swollen. I'd not paid much attention before but now I'm cataloging everything.

I’m pregnant. I have to be. At seventeen.

Instead of fretting like a normal human would, my heart swells with happiness. A baby. We made a baby. Out of love. It won’t be just us two all alone. Happy tears stream down my cheeks. I want to tell Dad but I’m afraid of how he’ll react. He’s been grumpy lately and I don’t know why. I think he’s stressed about something but I’m not sure what. I’ll have to tell him next time he’s in a playful mood.

When I hear his boots clomp up on the porch, I let out a squeak and quickly snag a hoodie to pull on over my head. He steps inside, a cold rush of air sweeping in with him, and regards me with a frown.

“What?” I sound guilty and desperately try to hide it. I’m glad the bucket is in the corner. I’ll have to get rid of the puke when he’s not watching.

“Bears. I saw two more while out.”

Panic rises up in my chest. This place is crawling with bears. “Do they smell the skin of the dead one?”

He rolls his eyes and my chest clenches in pain. “They don’t give a damn about the hide drying out in that tree. They’re curious about our cabin though. I found claw marks near the door like one was trying to figure out how to get in.”

Terror skitters through me. “What do we do?”

He frowns. “I’m going to have to fortify our home better and set some traps.” His eyes are tired and he looks older today as if he badly needs a nap. “Are you going to lay in bed all day like your goddamned mother or help?” he snaps.

I gape at him in confusion. What the heck is his problem today? “Reed __”

“Just put some clothes on and help me. There’s a ton of shit to do,” he barks out and storms from the cabin.

I burst into tears.

“I’m tired,” I whine, my arms weak from holding the heavy pine tree on one end.

He ignores me as I trudge through the snow behind him. It’s been a week since I figured out I was pregnant. Each day is the same. Morning sickness. Fatigue. Sore breasts. Cravings for that stupid fruit. But what’s the worst is that I cry at the drop of a hat. This seems to make Dad mad every time. He hasn’t touched me in I don’t know how long and I spend my nights sniffling in the darkness. I don’t know what to do.

“Put it down,” he barks out when we’re near the cabin.

I drop the thin tree on my end and dust off my gloves. He drops to his knees and whips out his knife. Just like he’s done the other twelve trees so far, he starts carving one end into a sharp point. He’s driving each one into the earth, braced by a fence-type thing he made and pointing the sharp end away from the cabin. His theory is that if a bear comes up, they’ll impale themselves on the wood long before they ever get to us. The spiked trees are horrifying to look at—like we’re in the middle of a zombie apocalypse or something. Dad doesn’t care though. He throws himself into his job.

While he works, I let my mind drift to the past. When he never looked at me with angry eyes.

Snakes.

Everywhere.

Eating me alive.

It’s the same nightmare I’ve had for four years, ever since my brother died from a snake bite.

“Daddy!”

Mom told me last time I screamed for her during a bad dream that I was too old to be having nightmares. So now I just call for my dad. He always comes. He always saves me.

I hear his bedroom door bang against the wall as he runs from his room. Heavy footsteps make their way quickly to my room. The door gets flung open and soon he’s sitting on the edge of my twin bed.

“Everything okay, Pip? Snakes again?”

I start to cry because the nightmares remind me of my brother. Dad grabs the blanket and lifts it so he can join me in the bed. As I sob, he pulls me against his warm chest and holds me. Each kiss on the top of my head warms and soothes me.

“I’m sorry I woke you up,” I whisper.

He strokes my hair. “I’ll always come for you. No matter what. If you need me, I’ll be there. I love you, Devon. It’s my job as a parent to protect you.”

Bitterness creeps up my throat. “Mom doesn’t like it when I have the nightmares.”

He lets out a soft sigh. “I know. Your mom is dealing with her own issues that don’t involve you. Sometimes, she takes them out on you and it isn’t right. I’m sorry.”

“Sometimes I wish it were just us,” I whisper, mostly to myself. It’s the truth though. Dad and I have more fun without Mom. When she’s smiling, I love it. But she hardly smiles or engages.

“Don’t say stuff you don’t mean,” he says firmly, his body tense.

I sniffle. “I do mean it though. She’s not like the other moms. It’s embarrassing.”

He takes my hand and we thread our fingers together. “She has her reasons.”

“What reasons?”

I can hear his teeth grinding together. “Nothing you need to worry yourself over.”

I can’t fathom what her reasons could be for treating her surviving child and husband as if they are a bother to her.

“I wish she was like you. You’re the best.”

He snorts. “Hardly, Pip. I’m a very flawed individual.”

“Lies,” I say, laughing.

“I’m serious. I put on a good show for you but I’m far from perfect. I’m a moody bastard and I lose my temper.”

“But I never see it,” I argue.

His hand squeezes mine. “Because I do my very best to keep that from you. You don’t need to see my bad days and when I lose control. I keep things to myself to protect you because I love you. One day, you’ll understand this.”

I drift off thinking he's yanking my chain because to me, he's perfect.

I sniffle as the memory fades. Maybe he's hiding something to protect me. He'd warned me long ago that he had his own fair share of issues. I just wish he'd talk to me. I'm frowning when I swear I hear voices. Dad is grunting as he shaves the wood and is making all kinds of racket. I stand and walk away from him to get a better listen. My ears are perked up trying to hear.

"Jesus Christ, Devon," Dad growls. "There's too much shit to do to be standing around. Go make yourself useful."

My jaw drops as I stare at him. His back is turned to me and he's tense.

"I think we should talk," I murmur.

"Goddammit, go inside before I get my belt."

Hot tears well in my eyes and I run toward the cabin. When I see the bear hide that I've been working on for weeks, washing and oiling, I decide it's good enough. With a huff, I yank it down from the side of the cabin and haul the heavy thing inside. I have to pull out my knife so I can cut it to fit the space. I make sure to put the longest, thickest strip between the mattress and the fireplace. Then, I use the extra pieces to cover other parts of the cabin floor. After kicking off my shoes, I almost shout out with excitement that we officially have carpet. I want to holler at Dad and make him come look but he's too pissy. Once I shimmy out of my jeans, I put my yoga pants back on and settle for one of his warm sweatshirts. My stomach growls. Since I'm in trouble anyway, I sneak into the cave and steal a can of peaches from the back. It has a pull top so I rip off the lid and gobble down each peach before slurping down the juice. When I hear him coming, I hide it away in the back of the cave.

The door bursts open and I swivel around, a guilty look on my face.

He sniffs the air and I know I'm busted. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing."

"Don't lie to me, Devon."

Anger rises up inside of me. Screw him for treating me like this with no explanation. I lift my chin. “I ate a can of peaches.”

His features darken and he stalks over to me after he shuts the door. He strikes out at me with his strong hand to grip my jaw. With each breath he takes, his nostrils flare. “Got something else to tell me?”

I swallow and shake my head. Now is definitely not the time to tell him I’m pregnant.

He scowls. “I can’t take you fucking lying to me.”

“And I can’t take you acting like a giant asshole,” I snap back.

“Don’t you dare take that tone with me, young lady,” he snarls in his most authoritative dad voice.

I scoff at him. “Really? Now you want to play the part of daddy? I bet you want to spank me again too.”

“Maybe you need your ass whipped!” he roars, his grip on my jaw tightening.

I shake him away and slap his face. We both stare at each other in shock. He growls and it pisses me off so I slap him again. Over and over until he grips my shoulders and turns me around before pushing me face first into the cave. I struggle but then he’s pulling my pants down. His belt flies off with a swoosh and he whips me with it. Fire slices across my bottom and I scream. He hits me again.

“I hate you!”

“I wish you actually did!”

I’m sobbing when the belt gets tossed to the floor. He shuffles behind me and then his cock is pressed between my thighs. With a rough thrust, he drives deep inside of my sex.

“Oh, God,” I whimper. I look over my shoulder and stare down my feral man. Heartbreak shines in his eyes and I don’t understand it. I cry harder as I try to touch him. “I love you, Dad. Please don’t be mad at me.”

His touch is soft as he wraps his arms around my middle and lifts me. Our bodies are flush and he leans me against the cold stone wall. He kisses me hard on the neck and I turn my head in desperation to meet that kiss with my mouth. Our mouths mate in a wild way as he bucks against me. His hands are all over me. My stomach. My breasts. My clit.

I cry out when my orgasm hits. He sucks on my tongue and drains himself inside of me. Does he know? He’s been pulling out each time. The moment we come down from our high, he pulls out and scoops me in his

arms. I'm carried over to the bed where he sets to stripping me the rest of the way down. His mouth worships my body while I sob. When I chance a look at him, his eyes are red and teary as he splays his palm over my stomach.

"I was so mad when I realized you were pregnant. I counted the days. Watched the signs," he breathes against my flesh. "I can't lose you, Devon. I can't fucking lose you."

I sob so much I think my chest will explode as I finger his overgrown hair.

"I want to have this baby with you," he chokes out. "So bad. But so help me if you die, I'll shove my .45 into my mouth and take my life. I can't do this without you, baby. I can't fucking do this."

We spend the rest of the day curled around each other making sweet love. He apologizes over and over again.

"Your mother saw me lose my cool plenty of times," he tells me, his voice sad after supper. "I'm moody when I'm pissed. Unfairly, I took it out on you."

"It's okay, Reed." Earlier I slipped up and called him Dad.

"It's not okay," he breathes. His mouth trails down my throat to my collarbone. "You're too sweet and perfect to deal with that. I fucked up."

"Isn't that what couples do? Fight and then make up?" I ask.

He lifts his gaze and smiles. "I suppose so. The makeup sex was pretty damn hot, I'll admit."

It was angry and animalistic.

Brutal and fierce.

I came so hard I saw stars.

"It was," I agree. "But next time you're mad, talk to me. It's too lonely out here to be alone. You're the only other person I have. When you don't talk to me or you yell at me, I feel so lost. Please promise you'll try."

He kisses his way down to my stomach. "I promise to you and our little baby here that I'm going to be the best dad ever."

I hold out my pinky and he takes it.

He always does.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

reed

Crunching in the snow wakes me from a dead sleep. It's early in the morning and the sun is just shining in. When Devon asked for a window, I found one of the only unbroken ones, a small one that had been over the RV sink and brought it back to the cabin. I cut a hole near the ceiling above the table on the east side so the morning sun would shine in and warm our bed. After I installed the window and braced it with wooden strips, Devon made curtains from some of the torn sheets from the RV. It warms my heart that she's made this place her home.

I listen for the sounds. My fence isn't complete. I'm hoping to finish it in the next few days. Until then, we're vulnerable to bears. She sleeps soundly beside me. Her naked body pressed against mine is warm and soft.

Fuck, I was such an asshole to her yesterday.

I knew, deep down, she was pregnant and I flipped my shit. Horrible scenarios where she bled out in each one trying to deliver our baby replayed over and over again like a record in my head. In my fear of losing her, I was pushing her away.

I reach over and run my thumb over her plump lip. She's so innocent. So fierce and loving. I don't deserve her, but I don't care. She's mine to love forever. Leaning forward, I palm her stomach that holds our child and kiss her cheek.

Crunch.

My body stills as I listen. Slowly, I creep out of bed and pull on my jeans. If there's a bear out there rooting around, I plan on shooting the bastard before he gets a chance to get inside of here. I pull the .45 out of her jeans pocket and sheath my knife in my belt. Jerking on a shirt, I make my

way to the table to stand on and look out the window. I'm just hiking my foot up when I hear it.

Voices.

Before I can comprehend if they're real or not, our cabin door flies open. An older man with salt and pepper brown hair and missing teeth grins at me holding a sharpened piece of wood in his hands.

"What the fu—" I start but then he's lunging at me.

The guy is taller than me but I have more weight on him. He manages to tackle me but I quickly overpower him. I punch him hard one, two, three times in his ugly face until I knock his ass out.

"Papa!" A deep voice hollers from the doorway. Fuck, there're more. At this point, Devon sits up in bed and screams. The creep in the doorway can't be any more than Devon's age. When his predatory gaze lands on my daughter, I launch myself at him.

Another guy bigger than him charges into the cabin and whacks me over the head with a rock. I crumple to the floor, grunting, trying desperately to keep from blacking out.

"Daddy!"

Her scream jerks my eyes open. The big guy kneels with his knee in my back and a blade pressed to the back of my neck. I watch helplessly as the kid advances on my daughter.

"She's yours, Nathaniel."

The fuck she is.

"Run, Devon!"

She screeches as she attempts to run naked past the kid but he grabs her around the waist. The guy pinning me down is laughing and cheering on the kid as if this shit is fucking funny. I try to reach into my back pocket for my gun but he stabs me in the arm.

"She moves too much, Ezekiel," Nathaniel grumbles.

"Make her stop," Ezekiel challenges.

Fuck.

I struggle and roar to no avail. I watch in horror as Nathaniel begins slinging my daughter around. Slamming her head into the side of the cabin, hitting her over and over, kicking her. She screams and pleads. And then the unthinkable happens.

He pins her to the bed face down. The motherfucker pulls his dick out and pries her thighs apart despite her struggling. I know the moment he

starts raping her because the blood-curdling scream makes my heart turn black with rage.

“STOP!” I bellow this order out on repeat but it goes ignored.

Helplessly, I have to watch as he slams into her over and over again. Her sobs tear out pieces of my soul and toss them all over the cabin. I can’t watch and yet I can’t allow her to be alone through it. Our eyes meet and I beg her to stay focused on me.

The kid grunts out his orgasm within seconds. Then he’s standing and walking over to Ezekiel.

“My turn,” Ezekiel growls.

“No!” I shout.

He kicks me hard in my still sore ribs and I howl in pain. The kid takes his place but he’s not as strong. As soon as Ezekiel mounts my daughter, her screams are louder than before. He’s hurting her worse than the kid. I go black with rage and I shake off the piss ant despite the blade sticking out of my arm and the pain in my side. I yank my gun from my pocket and put a bullet right through Ezekiel’s face. He grunts and collapses on Devon whose screams are on repeat. Next, I put a bullet through the skull of the unconscious man on the floor. Then, I turn around but the kid is already bolting. I storm outside after him. He runs away from me quickly. I manage to pop off two shots that hit him in the shoulder and back thigh. His howls of pain fuel me on but Devon is crying out my name.

“Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!”

As much as I want to go after the fucker, I can’t leave her in this state. I rush back inside and go to her. The guy is still on top of her. When I push him off, I’m enraged to find he was in her ass. Blood is everywhere. She’s shuddering so hard I think she’s going to vomit. I drag him and the other guy out of the cabin so she doesn’t have to look at them. Then, I’m back inside pulling her into my arms.

She’s sobbing so much and I can’t fucking fix her.

My shaking palm smoothes over her silky hair and I kiss her so many times. I promise her everything will be okay. She trembles out of control. I don’t know what the fuck to do. All I can do is clutch her pinky.

And then it happens.

A low, guttural howl rips from her chest. “Noooo!”

Hot liquid soaks the thighs of my jeans. Jesus. Fuck. No.

“Noooo!” she continues to screech, her head shaking back and forth.

I squeeze her tight. “Baby…fuck…baby…”

“Noooo!”

Her tears soak my chest and I soon realize I’m crying along with her. In one moment, our world was completely destroyed. Those men stole so much from my daughter. They fucking raped her and hurt her bad enough that she’s losing our child.

“I’m so sorry,” I choke out. “Pip, I’m so sorry.”

I want to go after Nathaniel. I want to gut him like a goddamned fish and make him eat his entrails. I want to shove my knife so far up his ass that he can feel it in his throat. I want to cut out his eyeballs and offer them to my daughter so she can crush them in her fist.

But I do no such thing.

Yet.

She needs me.

I spend an hour cleaning her body and checking over her wounds. Her ass only bled a little from the intrusion so no major damage. But her pussy was brutalized. It was all the blood from the loss of the baby that had my heart breaking into a thousand pieces. She mentally checked out. Passed out from shock and exhaustion.

Once she’s clean, I observe her. Her abdomen is already heavily bruising where that motherfucking kid beat her up. My poor sweet girl. I’m sick and raging and losing my goddamn mind.

I don’t leave the cabin to check my traps or work on my stake fence or anyfuckingthing. I stay at her side. Whispering assurances. Spoon feeding her. Making her drink water. Tending to her needs. My arm hurts so fucking bad where he stabbed me but the best I could do was clean it and wrap it in gauze.

After a tiring day, I curl up against my girl. She shudders even in her sleep. The nightmares will be back. And just like before, I’ll hold her through them.

For an entire week, she sleeps. Every second of every day. I'm weary and going mad but I don't dare leave her yet. I'm desperately trying to bring her back to me. I've brought her cans of fruit that go untouched. I've tried telling her stories about Drew. Nothing makes her engage.

It's so reminiscent of Sabrina I could throw up.

I refuse to let Devon be defeated. She's so much stronger than her mother.

"When your mom had her first miscarriage, I learned firsthand what depression was," I murmur against her shoulder blade as I tenderly rub her bare belly.

She stiffens but doesn't reply so I continue.

"Everything was fine. We'd only been married for one summer and she turned up pregnant. She was so fucking happy. We both were. But then one day when we were driving home from dinner, she cried out. I remember to this day the look on her face. Absolute horror. And then it was followed by a gut-wrenching sob." I swallow down my emotion. "We went straight to the hospital. She lost the baby at thirteen weeks."

Devon starts to cry and I hug her tighter.

"For an entire year after that, she was broken. It happened once more and it crushed her. But then you guys came along." I smile against her shoulder and kiss her softly. Skating past that entire story, I fast forward two years later. "When you both were around four, your mom got pregnant again. She was so afraid of losing it. Obsessively went to the doctor. Everything was fine. Until it wasn't. At the dreaded thirteen-week mark, she lost that baby too."

Devon's entire body trembles as she cries.

"Jesus, was she ever fucking depressed. I wanted to take care of her but I didn't know how. After her losses, I laid in bed with her just like this. Kissing and hugging her. But with the last one, I had to take care of you and Drew. I couldn't lay in bed with her. I think this made her sink into a deeper depression but I didn't know what to do about it."

"Why didn't you ever tell me?" she whispers.

I nuzzle against her hair. “I told you I wanted to protect you from the bad stuff.”

“I grew up being so angry at her…”

“Shhh,” I coo. “It’s okay.”

We stay cuddled together for a long while before I speak again.

“She lost another baby right before your tenth birthday.”

Devon tenses in my arms. “I feel so bad for her. I…I’m devastated and it was just the one baby.”

“You’re going to be okay, Dev. I promise. You’re going to pull out of this and one day we’re going to have the family we deserve. But until then…” A growl rumbles in my throat. “I won’t sleep until I’ve hunted him down.”

She relaxes her body and turns to face me. Her palm goes to my bearded cheek and she smiles for the first time in a week. “I want him to suffer.”

I grab her pinky with mine and kiss her knuckle. “That’s something I can deliver, sweetheart.”

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CHAPTER TWELVE

devon

While Dad works on his fence, I whittle a small branch. I'm making a cross to hang on the wall beside our bed. For Peach. I don't know if our baby was a boy or girl but I feel like it was a girl and I named her Peach. It's been two weeks since we lost her. I sit for hours working to make it perfect. I even carve her name into the branch. As soon as I hang it, I cry so hard I eventually pass out.

"You need to eat something."

I blink away my sleep and scrunch my nose in confusion. It's dark outside. How long did I sleep for? I accept the steaming bowl of stewed bear that no longer turns my stomach. My stomach grumbles and I gratefully eat it.

I steal a look at Dad as he undresses after a hard day of work. He strips down to his boxers and I can't help but roam my eyes over his perfectly sculpted body. All of the physical labor has molded him into an Adonis. My heart seems to pump blood for the first time. I watch him as he strolls over to the door and slides the heavy branch into the slot. It's durable and keeps any would-be predators out.

"Fence is finished," he says as he roots around in the cave for something.

I take another bite of my stew and then smile. "Really? That's great news. The gate too?"

He nods. "Bears aren't getting in." He doesn't mention people and it wipes the smile from my lips.

When he returns, he's holding one of his few precious liquor bottles he has left. I devour the rest of my stew while he adds some logs to the fire. He takes my empty bowl and sets it on the table. Then, he saunters over to me.

The fire casts delicious shadows all over his body. His black boxers stretch over his impressive cock that isn't even hard right now. Heat floods down south and I blush. The last person who'd been inside me was Ezekiel. A shudder ripples through me.

"What's wrong?" he asks, concern written all over his handsome face. He swallows back some liquor.

I hold a shaky hand out to him. "I was just remembering how Ezekiel…" I trail off and tremble.

"Drink, baby."

Our eyes meet and I sip down the liquid fire. It burns me all the way to my hollow stomach. Just above where I'm not carrying my baby anymore. This thought has me drinking again. And again. And again. The bottle gets pried from my grip. Dad drinks greedily from it as he towers over me, his gaze glued to my bare breasts.

I reach for the bottle and he relinquishes it. We pass it back and forth until my entire body—no my whole soul—is blazing.

"I don't want him to be the last thing I remember," I blurt out, my eyes teary.

He polishes off the bottle and tosses it onto the bear carpet. With haste, he pushes down his boxers and his heavy erection bobs out. I lie back on the pillows and open my body to him. He settles on top of me but doesn't make any moves to enter me yet. Instead, he kisses my throat.

Possessive.

Hungry.

Feral.

As if he's trying to mark me with his teeth.

I whimper and my body thrums with the need for him to slide into me and erase the horrors. His cock rubs against my clit dizzying me. Our mouths finally meet and he kisses me as though he requires me to breathe.

My dad, my best friend, my lover pushes into me suddenly. No warning. Just one thrust, driving home. We fit. Perfect and whole. I claw at his flesh as I kiss him in desperation. His powerful hips thunder against me as he fucks away the heartache and pain. Nothing else exists in this moment except us.

He flows through my veins hotter and more fervent than the alcohol I just consumed. With him, it isn't one sensation, it's *all* of them.

Love. Lust. Darkness. Light. Right. Wrong. Sadness. Happiness. Anger. Everything.

When his fingers move to touch my clit, I shake my head. “Just fuck me.”

He growls. “Hell no. You’re getting off, baby. I’m not playing this game again.”

I have no idea what he’s talking about and the moment he touches my clit, I don’t care. He knows me better than myself. I need to disappear from reality for a moment. His fingers are experienced at touching me and I soon lose control. My back arches up off the mattress as I cry out in pleasure. The orgasm is intense but it chases away all the evil that seemed to be haunting me. His teeth sink into my throat and he bites me hard enough to remind me that I’m alive. When I moan, tears of joy sliding down my face, he comes with a groan. Hot, explosive cum jets deep inside of me. And selfishly, I pray for another baby. I don’t want to replace Peach but I want a family with Dad.

Once he’s done coming, he pulls out and lays beside me. His fingers trace patterns all over my breasts and stomach. I stare at his handsome face that’s relaxed and happy.

“Do you love me like you loved Mom?” I ask, my voice but a whisper.

His thumb runs across my lips. “I loved your mom a lot in the beginning. But over time, I fell out of love with her. We just didn’t connect anymore. I wanted to love her. I forced myself to love her. But I wasn’t in love with her.” He leans forward and kisses me. “But you? I fucking love you more than words can describe. It isn’t a feeling—it’s like a storm that crashes into me and obliterates me. I can’t stop it. I wasn’t prepared for it. I just know that it’s the best thing and scariest thing to ever happen to me.”

I frown at him. “Why the scariest?”

His palm slides down to palm my breast as he frowns. “Because I’ve never felt like I couldn’t live without someone. What we have makes no sense outside of this cabin. It defies the rules and logic we were forced to learn. Laws are being broken—all of them I’m guilty of. Despite the chances we’re taking to be together, I’m diving headfirst. I don’t stop to think about repercussions or reality. All I know is I want you. If that means keeping you here forever all to myself, I’ll do it. I don’t want to return to society if it means what we have is seen as disgusting or wrong. And that scares the hell out of me. When I truly think about the fact that I’m a forty-

year-old man who is sleeping with his seventeen-year-old daughter, it fucks with my head. I live every day with this battle of morals. The fact that I'm easily cutting out the part of me that cares what people would think says that I'm losing myself. I'm not the man who drove that RV out here. I'm some beast the wilderness created. I take what I want and that's you."

Tears slip out of the corner of my eyes. "You didn't have to take me. I gave myself to you. I'm yours. Here or out there. I always was."

He smiles and leans forward to kiss my nipple. His breath is hot against me. "Tomorrow I'm going to hunt down that motherfucker. Then, I'm going to come back and make love to you until you're pregnant again. I won't let anything happen to you. So help me, I'll kill every fucker on this planet before I let another person even look at you. You're my secret. My everything. Nobody deserves to be in your presence. Mine."

His possessive words aren't playful. He's dead serious. Just the thought of seeing anyone frightens me. I feel safe when it's just me and Dad locked away by ourselves.

"Promise?"

He grabs my pinky with his. "On my life. Because if anything comes between us and hurts you, my life doesn't matter anymore."

Dad works on packing a bag. Food. Weapons. Other supplies he needs for his hunting mission. Once he's got one ready, he takes me back to our first campsite. He rummages through the RV looking for things and I work on the mangled trailer. A lot of stuff is smashed and destroyed. It's been picked over by animals. With the patience of a saint, I slowly pull everything out. There's more stuff toward the back of the trailer. The trailer was nearly smashed in half but once I move stuff around, I am just small enough to squeeze through the dented metal. It's dark aside from a few holes in the side of the metal that allows sun to shine in. One of the first plastic tubs I open up has clothing in it. I pull out a piece and hold it to the light. I immediately recognize it as one of the frilly dresses I wore as a baby for our three-year-old pictures. Tears well in my eyes. Mom kept this. Despite her

detached personality, she was determined to take these memories with her. Memories of Drew and I. The dress is so pretty. It would have been perfect on Peach.

A sob catches in my throat, but I swallow it down. I stuff the dress back in the tub and seal the lid. One day I'll pull this box out and properly look through it. The next box I open has books and notebooks in it. It's my box. I let out an excited shriek as I pull some novels into my lap. I find a pencil bag and one of my notebooks I'd planned to write in. Greedily, I stuff my arms with them before sealing the lid. I'll come back for the rest later.

It takes some maneuvering but I eventually squeeze out with my haul. Once I'm out of the trailer, I find Dad sitting on a rock starting to skin a rabbit.

"Can you try and save the pelt?" I ask as I approach. "I think I can use them like I used the bear skin."

He looks up at me, blood running down the back of his hand from the rabbit and grins before nodding. Out here in the wilderness, with the snow as our backdrop and him looking positively feral as he skins the game, I feel my heart rate quicken. He's the kind of handsome you'd see on the cover of a romance novel or some Alaskan hottie calendar.

And he's mine.

"You're blushing."

I bite on my lip and shrug. "Just thinking about how hot you are."

His dark eyebrow lifts. "The feeling is mutual." He winks and the bird inside my ribcage flutters. "What do you have there?"

I smile and sit down beside him on the rock. "Some books to read and a notebook. I'm going to write."

He leans over and kisses my temple. "You're glowing. Are you happy?"

"Right now, like this. I'm happier than I thought I ever could be."

"Good. Me too."

Eventually he finishes with the rabbit and we head back to the cabin. He hands over the pelt and I set to washing it. I'll need to stretch it and oil it with the leftover bear fat but I'm excited to start collecting the soft furry pelts. It will be perfect for when we do have a baby to line the bed with. I'm sitting in the chair singing an old song Mom and I used to sing on the radio when I feel as though Dad is watching me. His features are dark as he cuts the rabbit meat for our meal.

“What?” I ask, heat creeping up my neck. He’s been inside of me more times than I can count and I still get all heated and embarrassed when he stares at me as though he wants to devour me.

“I love when you sing.”

I smile and continue with my task making sure to sing every song I can think of since he loves it. Once we’re both done with our tasks and eating, he boils some water.

“Before I leave tonight, I want to bathe you.” His voice is husky and raw. It sings to the woman inside of me that can’t get enough of the beast inside of him.

While he finishes with the water, I peel off all my clothes. His gaze is greedy as he roams it over my bare flesh. He sits in one of the chairs and places the steaming pot on the table.

“Come sit, Pip.” He pats his knee.

I walk over to him. He helps me sit on him so that I’m straddling his thighs. My sex feels open and exposed. It makes me want to ask him to put his fingers inside of me to fill the space. These thoughts make the blush spread down to my breasts.

“Are you embarrassed?” he asks as he sweeps my hair around to one side. He combs through the knots with his fingers, a brow lifted in question.

“I’m turned on,” I admit.

His smile is predatory but I’m not afraid. “I’m always turned on around you.” He grips my wrist and guides my palm to where his erection is stiff and throbbing inside of his jeans. “See.”

Instead of touching me where I want, he sets to getting the rag wet and wrung out. Slowly, he runs the scalding hot rag along my flesh. I hiss because it burns but it feels good because he’s the one doing it. Quickly, it cools. He runs it along my breasts and my nipples become hard pebbles. Leaning forward, he flicks his tongue out and tastes one.

“Your little nipples are my favorite things to put in my mouth,” he breathes hotly against my breasts.

I let out a whimper and run my fingers through his unkempt hair. He has me lift my arms where he washes underneath them and then he moves down to my stomach. My heart catches in my throat when his fingers linger on my stomach, both of us having a moment of silence to acknowledge our loss. Hot tears spill down my cheeks and splash his arm. He sets the rag on the table and takes both of my cheeks in his palms. His lips press to mine

and then he licks away my tears like a lion would lick the face of his lioness. I tilt my head back slightly and let him clean away the hurt. When I'm good and dry, he continues licking to my jaw and down to my throat. His palms roam my body in a way that feels halfway between him marking his territory and checking for ailments. Concern and possession. Equal parts obsession.

"Mine," he murmurs and then his fingers are right where I want them as he kisses my throat. One finger pushes inside of me followed quickly by another. The heel of his palm grinds against my clit as he uses his fingers to fuck me. "Always so wet for me. Good girl."

I whimper and rock against his hand. The pleasure sensations rippling through me are intense and overwhelming. I love how he plows through me every time we connect. He ruins me. Destroys me. And I love the feeling as he desecrates me.

His hand gropes my small breast while the other works me from the inside. Reality abandons me as I lose myself to the moment. I come hard and with a shriek when my orgasm strikes. I'm weak and dizzy and in near tears from the pleasure as he stands with me in his arms. He carries us to our bed and lays me out before him. I stare greedily at him as he rips off his shirt and bares his stone chiseled chest at me. His pectorals twitch and his abs ripple with movement. My mouth waters to run my tongue along the solid V-shaped muscles that point straight to his cock that owns me.

I'm spread open and waiting. My arousal dripping as the need for him becomes almost unbearable. He's quick with his movements in undressing but not quick enough for my liking. The moment his jeans and boxers are gone, I stare at his cock that points right at me. Long. Thick. Veiny. I know from experience that it feels like velvet in my hand. Soft and pliable on the outside but hard and unbreakable beneath. He tastes of salt and musk and him. My stomach practically growls for him.

He grabs my ankle and kisses the bone. Then, he slowly trails hot kisses along my calf and to the inside of my knee. The moment his beard hair tickles along my inner thigh, I let out a moan. He kisses the entire journey to my clit. There, he kisses me in an obscene way that would probably make people blush. Desperate and hungry. Sucking as though he wants to pull it right from my body and devour it for a snack. I'm still so sensitive from my last orgasm that I come with his name on my lips. And then his kissing continues along my stomach, between my breasts, and then to my

lips. His tongue dives inside my mouth the exact moment his cock pushes inside of me. I moan in surprise at the intrusion but he doesn't give me a chance to recover. Like a wild animal, he thrusts against me. Words of praise and vows of love are murmured against my lips as our bodies mold together as one.

I'm everywhere all at once.

I'm nowhere but here.

My mind is a cacophony of thoughts and out of control sensations as he shows me what it feels like for two souls to bind.

Threaded together. A tight braid of man and woman. A link that cannot be severed. We're beyond the thrill and needing to feel good. We're in love. Madly. Deeply. Desperately. Sickly.

I'll die without him.

I understand his words from before.

One cannot survive when the other half of your heart bleeds out. They're connected, which means you bleed out too.

He grunts out his release. The heat burns me from the inside and, once again, I pray for a baby. When love is this intense, this explosive, this real, miracles happen.

I want my miracle.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

reed

She sobs from the porch as I walk backward away from her in the dark night. I don't want to fucking leave her but I have no choice. The motherfucker who beat my daughter and then raped her, causing her to miscarry our baby, still lives and breathes somewhere out there. I will track him down and I will kill him. I've armed her with a shotgun that she's to use first and then ask questions. Nobody will touch her. She has enough food and firewood to keep her safe in the cabin until I return.

I will return.

"I love you," she calls out.

"I love you too." I wave one last time and turn away. The echo of the door closing shut and the branch locking her in calms my erratic heart. Leaving her is so fucking hard.

The pack is heavy on my back and the .45 stays in my grip ready to fire. If I see any bears, I'll kill them with a quick pop to the head. But if I see Nathaniel, I'm going to incapacitate him before taking my time murdering the sick fuck.

As I trek through the darkness, my ears are aware of all sounds, my mind drifts to earlier. With each passing moment, I fall deeper in love with Devon. It's an infinite fall with no bottom. Just gets deeper and deeper. I can't explain how fucking terrifying the feeling is but I'm obsessed with it nonetheless. I'm madly consumed by her. I'm not fulfilled unless I'm buried inside of her. I'm not whole unless our mouths are mating like our bodies do so well. I'm not happy unless she's happy. Her smiles are my sustenance. I don't need food or water. I just need to see her blue eyes shining with love and adoration and joy.

They raped her.

Stole so much from her.

Her sense of security. Her child. Her mind.

And yet she wades through that darkness and finds me. Unlike Sabrina ever could, my strong, fierce girl finds me. Seeks me out as though she thirsts for me. I'm fucking ravenous for her too.

Each day out here in the wilderness, I feel my sanity slipping. We grow up learning norms and behaviors that are deemed acceptable. Yet when all of life's easiness is stripped from us and we're thrust into something arduous, those norms get forgotten. They get shoved to the side as instinct guides the way. The mind is no longer needed. A useless organ. It's the heart that grows wild. It forges the way. It makes decisions that defy reason and instead break rules that don't exist out here.

The heart becomes a hungry, selfish beast.

It devours the mind and feeds the desires.

My heart is free.

No longer caged by the world but released by love.

I'm not sure how long I've walked for, but I can no longer see or smell the smoke from our cabin. If I had to guess, it's been a couple of hours. The wind picks up and I get a whiff of smoke. I clench my jaw because I'm close. I can practically smell the enemy.

People.

They are my nemesis.

This shack may not hold the rapist but it holds others who may try and steal what's mine. And for that, they will pay with their lives. No one will come onto my property and touch my love.

Something growls and I halt. My eyes dart over to the shadows. It could be a wolf—the sound is most definitely of the K9 variety.

"Easy there," I mutter as I lift my .45.

The animal stops growling and whimpers. The sound is familiar and niggles at my long shut off brain. Now curious, I approach the shadows. The whines grow louder. I kneel down and pat my thigh.

"Come here," I order.

With his head lowered and a rope tight around his neck, my goddamned dog Buddy creeps out toward me. I'm so overcome with joy that I leap forward and hug the dog. He licks my face as if he's happy as hell to see me. I quickly cut through the rope around his neck with my knife and massage away the dent in his skin from how it gripped him. He practically

attacks me. His tail wags as he licks my face all over. When his nose nuzzles against my hand and he lets out a small bark, I know he smells Devon.

“She’s back at the cabin, boy,” I coo. “I’m going to take you back home. Just gotta take care of something first. I’m going to make him pay.”

The dog, loyal as fuck, runs a circle around me. When I point back toward the cabin, he looks that way and sniffs the air. I let him go as he starts sniffing along the pathway I’ve come from. The scent of Devon has him eager and on the hunt. I stand and make my way to the front of the shack.

I push the door open slightly and notice a fire going in crumbling river rock fireplace. Sleeping on the floor in front of it are two guys close to Ezekiel’s age. Bearded. Toothless. Dirty. They’re ruffians with dicks in their pants. Dicks that could guide them to my daughter. I suppress a growl as I pull out my knife. The stink of sex is thick in the air. In the back room of the shack, I can hear sounds. Fucking.

I kneel down beside the bigger guy and dig my blade deep into his throat before slashing past his carotid. Blood spurts out, spraying my face, and then he’s gurgling, eyes wide in confusion as he clutches his throat. The man beside him stirs and I attack him next. He rouses just as I slash for him and blocks my hit. His eyes are filled with terror and surprise. He’s weak compared to me and I pin him down quickly. The knife plunges into his fat vein. I rip it back and forth destroying it, soaking myself with more blood, before I yank it out. My heart hammers in my chest.

Nathaniel.

I know he’s in there. I can practically feel it.

The door creaks open when I push through it.

“Not now, John,” Nathaniel grunts, his bare ass flexing as he drives into someone. “You promised she was mine tonight.” Another fireplace is in this room lighting it up for me.

His thigh has a red gnarly scar from where I got him with the bullet. I bare my teeth before pouncing. Grabbing a handful of his greasy hair, I yank him away from his fuckfest. His dick pops out with a vulgar noise. One quick glance at the makeshift bed and my heart stills in my chest. A girl with wild, messy brown hair and tears streaming down her face lies there with her legs spread wide open. She has no tits to speak of and is bare

between her thighs. If I had to guess, she's no older than eleven. Twelve max.

"Don't hurt my sister!" he pleads, dragging me from staring at the horrific scene.

I snarl with rage and slam him to the floor. He puts up a fight. Just a fucking youngster but filled with so much evil. In another life, a kid like this could have been friends with my Rowdy. But in this life, he's the villain. The fucking monster.

I stab him in his chest hoping I hit a lung. He doesn't get off easy like those other fuckers. I stab him again, this time lower in his fleshy abdomen. Gurgles and screams escape him. I snarl at him and plunge the knife into his side. He howls and cries and fucking begs like a pussy.

When he was making my daughter scream as he raped her and stole her baby, he didn't award her a pardon. He just took and fucking took.

So I take and fucking take.

His blood soaks my hands and I slash him over and over again against his chest. I want to steal his heart like he stole hers. I want the motherfucking thing in my fist. The girl on the bed sobs and I briefly wonder if I should kill her too. But then I recall the terror and despondency in her eyes. She didn't ask for this. They took from her too.

He stops squirming as he vomits up more blood that makes him choke. I can't stand the look on his face. So goddamned helpless. With rage that consumes me, I drive the knife into his face.

Again.

Again.

Again.

My knife gets stuck between bones in his face and I yank so hard I hear his neck snap. I manage to free my knife and land on my ass with a thud. When my gaze sweeps over him, peace settles around me like a refreshing fog. The one who hurt my baby is dead. Brutally ended.

I smile.

Like a fucking maniac.

The girl whimpers and I stand to my full height. She scrambles far away from me. My knife is clutched tight in my grip. I should just cut her throat and put her out of her misery. Her lip wobbles as she drags the blankets to cover herself.

"Thank you." The whisper from her lips has my soul calming.

“Can you survive on your own?” My voice is gruff.

She nods.

“I’m taking my fucking dog,” I snap.

Her body trembles and she nods once more.

“If you so much as come near my home and try to steal from us or hurt us, I will gut you like a goddamn fish.”

She widens her eyes as tears spill out.

“But if you need help,” I growl. “We can help.”

Her head shakes back and forth. “I-I don’t need help.”

I grunt because I don’t believe her.

“They deserved it,” I mutter. “They hurt my girl.”

Tears stream down her cheeks. “I’m glad you killed them.”

I reach into my pack and pull out a can of fruit. A whimper escapes her when I kneel beside her and place it on the floor next to her. I pat her head and then stand again. Before I’ve even left the room, I can hear the can rip open and slurping behind me.

That girl will be dead by the end of the week.

I’m almost to the cabin when Buddy trots over to me. I forgot about the spiked fence and gate. He waited patiently until I got back. His tail wags wildly as I approach.

“Good boy. Your momma is going to be so happy,” I tell him as I scratch behind his ears. I open the gate and walk onto the porch. “Devon, it’s me!”

I hear footsteps inside and the lock slides out of place. She answers wearing nothing but my sweatshirt. Her long bare legs are on display and fuck how I’ve missed them.

“Oh,” she gasps as her mouth parts upon seeing my gruesome appearance. I’m covered in other men’s blood. For her. Always for her.

Buddy pushes past me and a scream of surprise escapes her. But the moment she realizes it’s her beloved pet, she falls to her knees sobbing. I

think she's more excited to see the dog than me. He kisses her all over and she squeezes the life out of him. In this moment, I'm transported to the past.

"Who's a good dog?" Devon coos as she holds up a treat.

Buddy whines but remains seated. He knows the drill.

"You're a good dog," she praises and gives him the snack. He chomps on it and happily runs off to one corner of the backyard to eat it. When she stands up, her hands on her narrow hips, I frown.

"Did you leave work early to come swimming?" she asks, her smile wide. I can't see her bright blue eyes behind her glasses but I know they're shining with hope. I can hardly deny her a thing.

"I came home early so we could take Mom to the movies but…"

She lowers her head and frowns. "She doesn't want to go."

I clench my teeth and nod. "Did you want to call some friends over?"

"Seth asked if he could come over but you said no boys, right?" Her teeth bite down on her bottom lip.

My gaze rakes down her too-womanly body in a black bikini. The triangles barely cover the small swells of her breasts and her tiny nipples are erect beneath the wet fabric. Her bottoms are even smaller. She has hips that flare out and a narrow waist. Every teenage boy's wet dream. Hell, she's cost me one friendship already because I overheard one of my golf buddies talking to another guy at the club that he'd like to be her sugar daddy.

Boys are a bad idea.

The only man she gets is me because I can protect her from them.

"No boys," I agree with a growl.

She laughs. "I heard Seth was a bad kisser anyway. You just saved me, Dad."

"I'll always save you," I vow.

I get a sweet smile before she turns and gets ready to dive in. I was right. The material barely covers her ass. Anger swells inside of me that men and boys everywhere are beginning to notice my sixteen-year-old

daughter. Soon we'll be off to the Alaskan wilderness and nobody will look at her.

She leaps into the pool and submerges her body under the water. Effortlessly, she swims to one side of the pool. I'm still staring after her deep in thought when she climbs out on the other end. Water sluices off her body as she makes her way over to the hot tub. After the helluva day I've had, including the part where I yelled at Sabrina just now for being a selfish bitch, I could use to unwind in the hot tub.

I quickly head upstairs to change. Sabrina lies in bed naked, a silent invitation to make up, but I'm too angry still. I ignore her like she always ignores me and put my swim trunks on. Before heading outside, I grab a beer and make my way over to the hot tub.

Devon is singing with her back pressed up against the jets. She's so fucking cute with her wet hair now piled up messily on top of her head. Her head moves to the beat that plays in her head as I climb into the hot water. Once I'm seated, I tilt the beer back and take a cold swallow.

"No fair," she pouts as she makes her way over to me. I don't even argue when she takes the bottle and drinks a swallow. She's been stealing drinks of my beers for as long as I can remember. "Do you think we'll swim a lot in Alaska? Doesn't it, like, snow all the time?"

I laugh and take the beer back. "What? Miss I-Know-Everything hasn't checked the temperatures?"

She sticks her tongue out. "I did. Summers can be warm there. I just want to make sure. I love swimming."

When she reaches for my beer again, I switch hands and hold it away from her. She's playful as she lunges for it. Her breasts brush against my chest and I freeze. No dad wants to feel their daughter's tits. I'm still so weirded out that when she grabs the bottle, I release it. Instead of moving away, she settles in my lap. Like a thousand other times. But unease flits down my spine this time. Maybe it's the fact that we're both in our swimsuits. Maybe it's the fact I was just worrying over the fact that she looks like a woman now. Whatever it is, I'm afraid to move. I don't want to hurt her feelings. She's so sensitive because of her mother's blatant neglect. We've always been close. I've never pushed her away. I'll be damned if I start now.

"I read up on how to tan pelts. There are oils and stuff you can buy but you can use nature's supplies as well. I wonder how Buddy will feel if we

ever skin an animal around him." She laughs and sips the beer. "I bet he'd think we were barbaric."

I laugh, my arms wrapping around her middle like always. "You think you're going to be out there tanning hides? What in the world would you ever need animal furs for?"

She shrugs and leans against my chest. "To pet."

Snorting, I steal my bottle back and take a long pull. "That's silly. That's what you have Buddy for."

"But rabbits are so soft," she says, a smile in her voice. Then she looks up at me. When the hell did she grow up on me?

"They are. Are you really ready to leave all this behind? No more hot tubs or pools or bad kisser Seths." My growl at the last part makes her giggle.

She takes the beer and downs the rest. Then she wiggles her ass against me as she leans forward to set it on the ledge. The movement causes a physiological reaction that I wasn't expecting.

A motherfucking erection.

I shove her away from me and clear my throat. "I have to get another beer since you drank mine." My voice is husky and I feel as though my face is red with embarrassment.

She stands up out of the hot water and puts her hands on her hips again. Her swimsuit is slightly off kilter on one side and the pink of her nipple is showing.

Tearing my horrified gaze away from her, I rush out of the hot tub careful to keep my stupid, disgusting erection away from her line of sight. "I'll be right back," I bark out.

I don't fool with a towel, just rush into the cold house. My dick is throbbing and I'm pissed about it. This is all Sabrina's fault, I decide. Had she just gone to the movies with us, I wouldn't have had a creepy moment with my daughter. Fucking sick.

I storm through the house ready to give Sabrina a piece of my mind. When I barge through the bedroom, she's still lying there like a lazy ass. Naked. With a growl, I shove down my wet shorts and prowl over to her. I smack her thigh causing her to yelp. Then, I grab both ankles and drag her to the end of the bed. She cries out when I flip her onto her stomach. My erection is aching for release. I slip it past the crack of her ass to her cunt. With one hard thrust, I drive into her. Reaching forward, I tangle her hair in

my fist. I fuck her hard and without apology. Several times, I slap her ass so hard she screams. When I get ready to come, my mind slips from this moment. To a tiny sliver of forbidden nipple. I nearly gag in disgust at myself. And yet I come harder than ever before. Pulling out, I shoot my cum all over Sabrina's now red ass.

"That was so good," she moans from the bed.

"Are you going to come to the movies with us now?" I bark out, anger still surging through me.

"You exhausted me," she says with a small laugh. "I'll sit this one out."

I grit my teeth. I want to slap the shit out of her to knock some goddamn sense into her. She's singlehandedly destroying her family.

"Of course," I snarl.

Once I'm showered and dressed, I come back outside. Devon perks up when she sees me. She climbs out of the hot tub and saunters over to me. Jesus. Who taught her to walk like that—hips swaying and shit? I'm irritated at myself for being weak. Infuriated at Sabrina for giving up. And bothered by Devon that she's seducing male parts of me that are strictly off limits to her.

"Are you mad?" Her bottom lip pouts out. "It was only a few sips, Dad."

I scrub at my smooth jaw and shake my head. "I'm not mad at you, Pip. Let's go see a movie just you and I."

She beams and stands on her toes to plant a wet kiss way too close to my lips. "You're the best. I'll be ready in thirty minutes."

With shame surging through my veins, I watch as her ass bounces away toward the house.

I'm losing my damn mind.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

devon

"I'm so happy!" I cry out as I stand and search Dad's eyes. He's frowning and his scowl is in place. As handsome and as fierce as he looks with blood splattered all over his bearded face, I like him better clean so we can kiss. "Go sit in the chair."

He blinks away his daze and offers me a small smile before doing as he is told. With haste, he strips out of his outerwear and sweatshirt until he's wearing nothing but his jeans and socks. I feed Buddy some leftover rabbit pieces and make him a bowl of water. He seems content to lie on the bearskin rug, gnawing on the meat.

When I turn to look at Dad, he's seated wearing a predatory glare that makes me shiver. I boil some water and then prepare to clean him. My eyes skitter over his chest every chance they get. His muscles are a work of art. I set to washing the blood from his face and hair. His dark brown eyes bore into mine. He's extra intense tonight. I mean, he did kill someone. I'm guessing that would make anyone intense. Instead of feeling frightened, I feel relieved. He's living up to his promise to protect me no matter the cost.

"Do you remember the last time we planned to go to the movies before we came out here?" His voice is strained. Hoarse.

I stroke my fingers through his hair. "Of course I do." It was one of the first times I'd felt unusual hormonal sensations surging through me. With my dad of all people. As I clean him, I think back to that day.

I've never been on a date. I'm not old enough Dad says. But every time he and I go out together, I pretend that's exactly what it is. He always dresses nice—a lot nicer than the dumb guys I'm friends with who live in the neighborhood. I'm proud he's at my side. And I always go the extra mile for him too. Since Mom won't go with him, I think he deserves someone pretty on his arm. Someone womanly. Tonight, instead of my usual jeans and T-shirts, I chose a powder blue sundress that compliments my eyes and hair. I coupled it with strappy tan sandals and straightened my hair smooth. When it's soft like this, Dad absently touches it a lot. I like when he touches my hair. Normally, I'm not one for a lot of makeup but tonight I doll myself up for him. Earlier, in the hot tub, he seemed angry with me. I don't want him to be mad.

Once I spritz on some perfume, I grab a small clutch and hurry down the stairs. He's waiting, looking young and handsome, in a pair of charcoal slacks and a white button-down shirt. The shirt is ironed crisp and he's left the two buttons undone at his throat. He's also rolled up his sleeves revealing his toned forearms. I smile because he looks really nice.

When our eyes meet, his eyes quickly roam down the front of my body before he shakes his head. "No."

Hurt clutches my heart and I frown. "No?"

"That dress…" His jaw clenches and looks away. "It's too…fancy."

I look down at the summer dress with the plunging neckline. Sure it's fitted and silky but not fancy. "Dad," I pout. "I like this dress."

"The dress isn't the problem," he grumbles. "It's how people will react when they see you in it."

I smile. "You afraid I'm going to find a boyfriend tonight?"

He doesn't laugh like I expect him to. Instead, he frowns and his fingers run through my smooth hair. "You're too pretty."

My heart does a little flutter at his words. "So protect me from those creeps," I tell him, beaming. "That's what dads do." I grab onto his forearm and he tenses. All I get is a clipped nod of agreement. It's enough.

Thirty minutes later and we're zipping through town in Dad's black sports car. We pass by the movie theater and I frown in confusion. He drives us all the way out to where the piers are and parks along the side of the road. As soon as I step out of the car, I can smell seafood and my stomach growls.

“I thought we’d have dinner instead. That dress is too nice to waste in a dinky theater,” he says gruffly.

My heart blooms like a flower. He takes my hand and I don’t feel like his young daughter. I feel like a beautiful woman on the arm of a handsome man. These people don’t know us. They might assume we’re a couple. The thought is a dangerous one but it’s not unwelcome. It sends tingles of warmth trickling through me. He squeezes my hand and I grin.

“We’d like an outdoor table that overlooks the bay,” Dad tells the hostess.

The hostess smiles and shows us to the table. I can’t help the embarrassed blush that creeps up my neck when Dad pulls my chair out for me. His fingers run through my silky strands for just a moment causing me to shiver. Then, he sits across from me, his brown eyes darker than usual.

“When you’re eighty and allowed to start dating,” he teases with a wolfish grin that turns my insides to mush. “You set that man straight on how you’re to be treated.”

I nod and smile. “I’m taking notes.”

He smirks which causes foreign heat to flood through me. His leg brushes against mine under the table and it sets my nerves alive. We order our food and Dad asks for a bottle of wine. The server doesn’t question my age. Simply brings out the expensive bottle and pours it into our glasses.

Dinner is fun. We laugh and talk and enjoy our food. We’re both excited about our upcoming Alaskan adventure. I can see the delight dancing in Dad’s eyes. He’s ready for this next step. I’m ready too. Selfishly, I’m looking forward to more time with him. He works so much that I feel like I never see him. As the alcohol buzzes through my system, I find myself accidentally brushing against his legs more often. His eyes are positively manic as he stares at me. I don’t understand the look but it seems to make my heart thunder in my chest.

After dinner, he guides me into a bar where people are dancing. He orders shots but only lets me have one. I pout and he laughs. His fingers, as if having a mind of their own, toy with a lock of my hair. I’m not sure that any date will ever be able to top this one with my dad. When the alcohol has him loose and laughing more often, he whisks me into the crowd of sweaty dancing bodies. The music is fast and we both start moving to the beat. He’s all smiles and I like when his hands keep touching my hips. It feels as though he burns me each time he does it. At one point, I’m dancing in front

of him with my back to his chest when his palm rests against my stomach. Burning desire surges through me. His other palm slides down my ribs and I let out an embarrassing moan that is thankfully covered by the music.

I'm drunk.

The feelings creeping through me are because of the alcohol.

His fingers slide further down my stomach. I don't think he realizes his pinky is touching my pubic bone. I'm so aroused that I'm dizzy. My panties are soaked with desire and my dress is drenched in sweat. When my knees buckle, he grabs me suddenly, his strong forearm just under my breasts.

"What's wrong?" he demands, his voice panicked against my ear. "Are you sick?"

"Dizzy. I'm just dizzy."

He pulls me to his side and guides me away from the dance floor. Once outside of the busy bar, he finds a sole chair on the corner of the deck. The wind is cooler now that the sun has set and it chills my skin. He sits in the chair and pulls me into his lap. Our bodies are sticky with sweat but the wind makes me shiver.

"Just let the alcohol wear off. I shouldn't have let you have that shot," he says, shame coating his voice. His fingers run through my hair and my belly seems to flop.

I snuggle against him for warmth. "I'll be fine in a minute. I just got too hot. Now I'm freezing." I laugh at the silliness of it.

His arms pull me tighter to him. Dad is warm and safe and strong. I start to drift off. His palm is rubbing circles on my lower back but eventually he stops and lets it rest on my butt. I don't think he realizes where he's touching me, but I don't correct him. I like his hand there.

I wake up later to him carrying me to my bed. I don't remember much but I'm eager for sleep. He removes my shoes and then covers me up with my quilt. I'm quiet as his fingers stroke my hair. His lips press to my forehead and he whispers something I almost don't hear.

"I promise I won't allow myself to have another selfish night like tonight."

My heart sinks because his selfish night was the best one of my life. But when he stalks away, I can't help but smile in the dark.

He didn't pinky promise.

“I wanted you that night,” I admit, my voice shaky.

His dark brown eyes sear into mine. “You did?”

“You were angry with me after the hot tub and I wasn’t sure why. I just wanted to please you. That’s why I dressed so pretty. For you.” I smile as I set the rag back down on the table.

His features are wild. An animal behind his eyes. “I wasn’t angry. I was disgusted at myself. You rubbed up against me. It made my dick hard. I thought I was a sick fuck.”

I frown and shake my head. “You’re not sick. You were never sick.”

He scowls. “Took it out on your mother.” Shame flickers in his gaze. “But I wasn’t satisfied. Something forbidden was festering inside of me. I wasn’t sure how to turn it off. That night, I selfishly wanted to pick at that internal wound if only for one night. I wouldn’t have done anything to cross the line but I just needed…”

I look at him from under my lashes, a shy heat burning across my cheeks. “I was dizzy on that dance floor because of the way you were touching me. I wanted more. I wanted it all. I wasn’t sure how to process that thought. Your fingers were so close.”

He growls and rubs at the back of his neck. “I almost touched you that night. The alcohol confused me. My eyes were closed. I was lost in the moment. If you wouldn’t have spoken, I’m afraid I might have rubbed my fingers against your clit right then.”

All this talk of that night has my panties wet. I peel away my sweatshirt and reveal my bare breasts to him. Breasts that he once thought were off limits. They were never off limits. Here or there, I’m sure I’d have offered them to him at one point regardless.

“I would have let you,” I admit with a whisper. “I’d have let you finger me then. In front of everyone. I wanted your touch.” I reach for his hand. “I still want your touch.”

He rises and towers over me. When I get twisted in his grip, I let out a shocked whimper. His hips start moving to an imaginary song. I bite my lip when I feel his erection poking into me. Two hands whisper over my bare

flesh, recreating that night. The one at my side tickles but the one dangerously low on my stomach has me seeing stars. I close my eyes and I'm back at that night. His fingers moving under my dress. Slipping into my panties and searching my heat. Thick fingers pushing inside of me. Owning me. I cry out in pleasure. My arousal drips from me like never before. He pushes my panties down my thighs and they fall to my ankles.

"Bend over," he demands, his voice husky.

I reach for my toes, offering my bare body to him. His jeans and boxers hit the floor before he starts rubbing his hot erection against my slick sex.

"Would you have let me fuck you right there on the pier if I'd asked?" His voice is feral and deep. I wince when his powerful fingers dig into my hips. "Tell me, baby girl."

I whimper at his sexy voice and words. "Yes. I touched myself that night. I imagined it was you. Sometimes I would pretend to have nightmares so you'd come into my room wearing nothing but boxers. I liked the way our bodies fit together. How you were so strong and virile. I was small and vulnerable. When in my bed, you kissed and held me like a lover would. Possessive and protective. You'd pet my hair as if I were yours and only yours. So many times, I wanted to straddle your thighs once you started snoring and—"

I scream when he slams into me with a harsh buck of his hips. My body trembles as if I might collapse, but his death grip on my hips prevent me from falling. He fucks me hard. So hard our skin makes a loud slapping sound. So hard the dog whimpers. So hard I know I'll be bruised everywhere.

"Harder," I beg.

I want him to split me in two and own me from the inside. His hips piston in an erotic way that has me wild with lust. I come with a violent shudder. He pulls out suddenly and I expect cum. Instead, he presses against the tight hole of my ass. Terror climbs up my throat but before it can escape, he runs his fingertips along my spine.

"I want him gone from there," he growls.

I know exactly what he means. Ezekiel was the last person to touch me there. Suddenly, despite the pain, I want it too.

"Yes," I choke out. "Gone."

He pushes in slowly and fire rips through me. I nearly suffocate on a sob I was attempting to stifle. Dad doesn't ram into me like that rapist. He's

gentle but possessive. I can barely hold myself up and I'm thankful when he sits back down in the chair with me impaled on his cock. The fire inside of me is raging but I trust him. He wraps his muscled forearm around my middle and pulls me flush against him. I tilt my head back to rest on his shoulder.

"Put your feet on my knees," he orders, his hot breath tickling my neck.

I assume his desired position and am thankful it seems to lessen the burn inside my ass. My sex feels open and exposed. And like a dog sniffing a bone, both of his hands explore me there. He rubs against my clit while he uses three fingers to push into my still dripping sex. The intrusion hurts but when I clench in response, pleasure zings through me. I'm so full of him. Everywhere. He fucks me with his fingers as if it were his powerful dick. I am so lost to all of the sensations that I feel as though I'm stepping outside of my body. His teeth ravage my flesh everywhere he can reach and I'm helpless. He's devouring me bit by bit and I'm elated.

With a soul-shattering scream, I come. I orgasm everywhere. I don't understand it. I can't describe it. I just simply explode. My body seizes in his grip and I black out as I shudder. The burn in my ass intensifies as his cock seems to expand. Then, hot cum is jetting inside of me.

I'm being consumed and swallowed whole.

I come again.

And then I pass out.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

reed

I grip my gift to Devon in my pocket. I've been carrying it around with me ever since I pulled it from where I found it. It's time. I want her to have it. It's been nearly three months since I slaughtered those men. Guilt should live inside my heart that I left a small girl with no one. But nothing exists inside my hollow chest but Devon. Always Devon.

Sniffing the cool air, I can't help but notice that the weather doesn't feel as cold. Spring will be here soon and will melt all this away. My darling girl will be in her element again in the river and hunting for berries. I can't wait to see her wearing less clothes too. When at home, we remain naked. Our stove is warm and it keeps us cozy. But after seeing the fireplaces at the shack, my brain has been whirring with new plans for our home. I want to move the fence out on one side and extend it. And when I do, I want to build an actual fireplace with a chimney to keep her warm.

I pick up the two dead rabbits at my feet and head back to the cabin. Devon will like the size of these animals. She's become obsessed with collecting their pelts. It's fucking cute how she yells at me if I don't skin them just right. God I love her.

"Honey, I'm home," I playfully sing as I clomp through the front door.

She's sitting cross-legged on our bed. Naked of course. Her long blonde hair is clean and brushed smooth. It hangs down in front of her small tits. A smile plays at her lips as she uses her mother's old sewing kit to stitch together the animal pelts. The blanket is getting bigger each day when I bring home more rabbit.

She lifts her gaze to mine and flashes me one of her smiles that lights up the room. "That didn't take long."

“I was gone hours,” I say with a chuckle as I close the door and lock it. “You were just lost in your task.”

She yawns and moves the blanket and sewing supplies to the floor. I pull off my coat, my eyes never leaving her, as she stretches out on the bed. Her hair falls away from her breasts that are slightly swollen. I don’t miss the tiny pooch on her stomach. This time, instead of jumping to conclusions or freaking the hell out, I pray for a baby. I don’t deserve it but I want it anyway.

“You look tired,” I observe as I undress. There’s a shit ton to do but right now I just want to lie with my woman.

Her eyes are a soft blue as she regards me. Once I’m naked and stretched out beside her, she takes my hand. She guides it over to her stomach and rests it there. A serene smile plays at her lips.

“I think I’m pregnant.” She bites down on her bottom lip, worry flickering in her eyes. I was such an asshole last time I found out, I can understand her reaction.

“Really?” My grin is wide as I lean forward to kiss her mouth.

“Really.”

I devour her lips and kiss her hard hoping she’ll feel how happy I am about this. After the loss of Peach, I’ve never wanted anything more. This baby is ours and nobody will hurt it. That vow is one I can feel deep in my soul.

Pulling away from her, I war internally with whether she’ll like her gift. I kept it all these months for her. In the beginning, it was for other reasons. Now, it means something completely different.

That is, if she’ll accept it.

“Stand up,” I order.

She arches a blonde brow but obeys. My girl always fucking obeys because she trusts me completely. I reach into my jeans pocket and pull out my gift. Still on my knees, I take her hand and look up at her.

“Devon Abigail Jamison. I know you won’t have a normal life but I’m asking you to live this life with me. Forever. Just us and the lives we create. Be my wife, baby. Please.” Her eyes are wide and shimmering with tears. I kiss her belly when she nods. Then, I take her hand and hold up her mother’s wedding band. “She would have wanted you to have this one day. I know it. I don’t have anything to offer but this. If you’ll accept it.”

Tears snake down her cheeks and her hand shakes. “Of course I accept it, silly. I love you. We belong together.”

I pull her down into my lap and we kiss hard.

We kiss until the sun goes down.

And we kiss until it comes back up again.

We. Just. Kiss.

“Pepperoni pizza with mushrooms,” she says groaning. “That would taste much better than rabbit.”

She’s definitely pregnant. Two months ago when I asked her to be my wife, we’d assumed she was. But now there’s no denying it. Her tits are bigger and delicious as fuck. And, Jesus Christ, even her belly is a turn on. Small and round but most definitely carrying a child. She gets sick often and sleeps a lot but it all feels normal. The cravings though are hard. I hate denying her but I also don’t want to burn through our supplies in case of emergencies.

“How about green beans?” I ask as I saunter over to the crevasse.

She claps her hands. “Really? We can really have some?”

I nod as I fetch the can. She’s thrilled as hell over a can of green beans. It makes me feel guilty that I can’t give her all the foods she wants all of the time. But I do sneak her a can of something—either fruits or vegetables—at least once a day because I know she needs the extra nutrients and meat isn’t enough for our growing baby.

Once I cook the beans and offer her the entire pot to eat, she chirps happily about things she wants to make for the baby as she inhales the green beans. I don’t focus much on what she’s saying but how she’s saying it. Her eyes are lit up with joy. A permanent smile is affixed on her pretty face. She’s so fucking happy. I’ve never seen her this way. So free and in her element.

“You’re beautiful,” I blurt out, interrupting her.

Her cheeks burn pink. “Thank you.”

I reach forward in my chair and finger her long hair. “I mean it. I can’t stop looking at you.”

She laughs. “You’re not so bad to look at either.”

When she launches into how she wants to lug some boxes back from the trailer, I get lost in staring at her. My mind drifts off to when we were packing that trailer.

“I’m bringing this.” Sabrina drops a plastic tub in front of me. Her eyes are flickering with life for once.

“What’s in it?” I ask, frowning. We’re supposed to be bringing less junk and more supplies.

“Some memories of when the kids were small. Important papers. Stuff like that.”

I want to tell her no but she hasn’t asked to take anything. If this is important to her, we’ll make room. It can collect dust in the wilderness like it collects dust here.

“Okay,” I concede.

She leaves me and flits through our now nearly-empty house, back to bed no doubt. I’m loading the rest of the trailer tonight and we set out tomorrow. We didn’t pack any furniture. Our plan is to live in the RV until I get the big cabin built on the top of the mountain. Once it’s finished, I’ll take the RV and trailer back to town to buy furnishings.

I put the plastic tub in the trailer along with about fifty other tubs. After I lock it up for the night, I head back inside. I’m sweating like a motherfucker so I peel off my shirt and head for the shower. Soon, showers like we’re used to will be a thing of the past.

Music plays from Devon’s room so I sneak up to check on her. I lean against the door frame and watch her. Her room is now empty aside from her bed and dresser that we’ve sold with the house. She’s reading a survivalist book and twirling a lock of her blonde hair. I can’t help but smile.

“What are you doing?”

She sits up and tosses the book onto the bed. "Learning how to suture wounds and which plants are poisonous. Question is, what are you doing?" Her gaze skims over my bare chest and I instantly regret taking off my shirt. Things have been weird since a few weeks ago when I took her to dinner. I lost my head that night and I'm desperately trying to regain control.

"Packed up the last of the boxes in the trailer. Got anything else that needs to get packed?"

She smiles. "Just me. Don't forget about me."

"I could never forget about you."

Both of us are silent for a moment.

"Dad…"

"Yeah?"

"I'm really excited about this." Her brows furrow together as she climbs out of the bed. "You're doing the right thing. For Mom. For us."

I hate that my stupid eyes skim over her nipples that poke out of her silky night shirt. Gritting my teeth, I force my gaze up to meet hers. She hugs me and doesn't even complain about my sweaty flesh.

"I love you," she tells me, her hot breath tickling my chest.

I let out a deep breath and stroke her silky blonde hair before kissing the top of her head. "I love you too, Pip."

"The wild. We're really doing it."

I hug her tighter. "We really are."

"Reed!" Devon screams from inside the cabin.

I abandon the wood I'm chopping and run inside, Buddy right on my heels. When I burst in, expecting the worst, I find her standing naked on the bed with both palms on her big round belly. We've guessed her to be about five or six months but we're not sure.

"Come feel," she tells me, her face bright and excited.

I stalk over to her and place my hands on her hard flesh. I'm frowning when something inside of her bumps my hand. Our eyes meet and I swear my heart stops beating in my fucking chest.

“Was that the baby?”

“No, it was the alien that took over my body,” she teases.

I laugh but don’t take my hands from her. I want to feel it move again. “This is the most amazing thing I’ve ever felt.”

She stares at me thoughtfully. “Even more amazing than when you felt Drew and I in Mom’s belly?”

Her words, so sudden and confusing, startle me. I step away as if my hands have been burned. Running my fingers through my hair, I back away from her.

“What’s wrong?”

“I-I just remembered I never brought those boxes to you. I’ll go fetch them now.”

When she frowns and her lip wobbles, I stalk back over to her. I take her face in my hands and kiss the hell out of her. “I love you,” I assure her. “I love our baby too. That was amazing, Dev.”

Her smile is back but it doesn’t reach her eyes. I wave to her and bolt outside. The warmer temps have melted off a lot of the snow. I’m boiling from the inside out. I tug off my sweaty shirt and tuck it into the back of my jeans as I stride back toward the trailer. It takes three trips of carrying two tubs each trip before I decide that’s enough for the day. Devon is no longer sad as she excitedly points at where she wants them. I’ve been building her shelves and a cabinet to store things. We’re quickly outgrowing our small space. Now that the warmer temperatures are here, I’m going to start on the extension.

I grab the big bucket we use for water and set off toward the river. It’s the same trip I make at least once a day. I’ve worn a path down to the river banks. One day I’ll build a small pier out here so we can have picnics and enjoy the sun without having to stay in the dirt. I’m just headed back and step into the clearing of our house when I hear it.

A voice.

Deep and manly.

A predator.

A motherfucking rapist.

Slinging my water bucket down, I grab the handiest object I can find which is my knife on my belt. I’m ready to gut the fucker.

“Whoa, fella. Calm down.”

The voice is familiar. My eyes bore into the stranger. He pulls off a beanie and his obnoxiously long golden light brown hair tumbles out. Jade colored eyes pierce mine.

“Reed Jamison?”

I stiffen, searching for my long-slaughtered brain to slot the final piece into place. “Atticus Knox.”

He lets out a slow breath, nodding. “Almost didn’t recognize you there, man. The beard and shit.” His eyes remain fixated on the knife that I’ve yet to put back into its sheath. Despite knowing the guy, my hackles are raised. I trust no one. The only person I trust is my Devon.

He’s a bigger guy than me and that sets my teeth on edge. Back when I bought this land, we shared a few beers after the closing. Nice guy. Mid-thirties. Played football in college. Family owns more acreage in Alaska than all the other families combined.

But now…

He’s a threat.

They all are.

“I just came out to check on you now that the snow is melted off some. You never showed up in town. I was sure you’d be back for supplies or something. Had my friends at the hardware store and the grocery store keep an eye out. Worried about you guys all winter. When I pulled up and saw what happened, I just knew you guys had been killed. But then I hiked down to the gorge and evidence was all over someone had been here. I’m so glad you made it,” he says, his tone genuine.

Anger surges through me. “My wife was killed on impact.”

Sorrow flickers in his eyes. “I’m so sorry. Your daughter?”

I clutch my knife tighter. Jealousy and protectiveness explode inside of me. I don’t want him asking about her or saying her name. “She’s fine.”

He lets out a breath of relief and scratches at his scruffy jaw. “You okay, man?”

Gritting my teeth, I shake my head. “You lied. You said no people were here. People. Are. Here.”

He takes a step back. “Calm down now, Reed. That was something I came to warn you about. On my land we found at least fifty squatters this winter. Some are violent. They’re fucking inbred.” The word on his tongue has him making a sour face. “Did they hurt you?”

My jaw clenches. “They hurt *her*.”

Understanding dawns on him and his face crumples. Sadness plagues his features. So maybe he isn't the enemy. "Fuck, man. How can I help?"

I swallow and shake my head. "I killed them. I fucking killed them."

He nods in approval. "Nobody cares about them. You won't go to prison."

Like I give a shit about prison.

"What do you want?" I ask, my tone harsh.

He's still staring at me as though I'm a wild bear that he needs to calm. "I just want to help you guys. Do you need any supplies? Medicine? Food?" His gaze flits to the cabin. "I see you were resourceful in making shelter."

My thoughts flip to Devon. With her having a baby soon, we will need supplies. I can't be stupid and run off my only tie to the outside world who can help us. Reluctantly, I nod. "Actually, we could use some things. You staying for supper?"

He smiles, his teeth perfect and white, unlike those fucking savages. "Of course."

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

devon

I get lost in going through my box of books. The heroes on the covers are all handsome but not as intense or soul-burning hot like Dad. Still, I'm eager to read them. There isn't much to do out here for fun. Reading is fun and I can't wait to pass that down to our child. I'm a little saddened I don't have any books for the little thing. Perhaps I'll write my baby some stories.

I pick up my notebook and write a children's tale about a fierce man who battles scary bears. The man's name is Reed and he saves the princess in the end. I'm smiling as I scribble down the story. That is until I hear it.

Voices.

Panic clutches my throat and I whimper. It's too dangerous to climb onto the table to look out the small window in my very pregnant state. Dad's voice is one of them and he doesn't seem alarmed or afraid. Still, I am worried. Quickly, I pull on my yoga pants I have to wear low on my hips—they're one of the few pieces of clothing I can wear—and then hunt for one of Dad's shirts. Everything of mine is too tight. Once I'm dressed and have my boots and coat on, I snatch up the shotgun and then I slowly open the door. With the quietness of a mouse, I creep around the side of the house. Dad stands with his back to the cabin talking to a man.

The man has wild golden brown hair and smiles as he talks to my father. He's not holding any weapons. I'm still afraid because he's taller and wider shouldered than Dad. If he wanted to hurt him, I'm afraid he could.

Chick-chuck!

I load the slug into the shotgun, ready to fire.

Dad jerks around and the guy gapes at me.

"Wh-What do you want?" I demand, my voice wobbling with fear.

“I’m not here to hurt you,” the man says, his palms up. “I came to see if you needed any supplies.”

“This is Atticus Knox. The fella I bought the land from,” Dad says in a soothing tone. It calms me marginally so. But the fact Dad still has the knife in his tight grip doesn’t chase away my fear completely.

“Supplies?”

“Anything you need. I can fetch it and be back in another week or two,” Atticus assures me.

“Why would you help us?” I question, anger and distrust dripping in my voice. “What do you get out of it?”

“Money,” Dad answers for him. “I have some in the safe that survived the crash in the trailer.”

“If I get you a list, you’ll get me what I need?” My mind begins to whir about all the things we’ll need for the baby. So maybe I shouldn’t shoot this man. He doesn’t look like the rapists from before. I shudder and meet his gaze with a feral one of my own.

He swallows. “Anything. Devon, right?”

My nod is clipped. “If you try to hurt us, I’ll shoot you,” I threaten.

Atticus smiles and it’s warm. “I understand. I only want to help.”

Despite the warmer temps, it’s not completely spring yet. A cool breeze from the north whips at us. The sun will set soon and I know it’ll be cold tonight.

“Are you staying for dinner?”

Both he and Dad nod.

Then, Atticus speaks again. “I thought I’d stay for a few days. Show you both some things about surviving out here that will be useful. Then I’ll be on my way.”

I finally lower the gun. “Okay.”

Dad winks at me and my heart warms. I beam back at him.

Atticus is impressed with the inside of our cabin and the fact that we utilized the cave as well. He marvels over the fireplace we made and the

furniture. The bloodstains on the quilts make him look away though. For me, they're a constant reminder of Peach, who I refuse to forget.

I stay bundled up in my big coat despite the warmth. My baby is safe from his leering eyes. But eventually I start to sweat. He and Dad chat easily sharing a bottle of whiskey Atticus brought with him. Every so often, Atticus regards me with soft, sad eyes. I don't want his gaze on me.

"You hardly touched your stew," Dad observes, a frown marring his handsome face.

"I'm not hungry."

His jaw ticks but he says no more on the matter. I continue to write down my list of things I need while they chat and laugh. It irritates me that this man is in our home. I don't want any man besides Dad here.

"There's one can left of the mixed fruit you love so much with the extra maraschino cherries," Dad says, his face still frowning. The worry is written all over his features. He wants me to eat for the baby.

With a sigh, I toss down my notebook and shed the hot coat. When I stand to go fetch the fruit—because just talking about it has my stomach growling—I catch Atticus staring at my pregnant belly.

Horror.

That is the only way to describe the look on his face.

I clutch it protectively as I pass by him to the cave. I can feel his unwanted eyes on me as I grab my fruit. When I pass back by him, he's frowning.

"I'll need stuff for the baby," I tell him pointedly.

He swallows and nods. "Write down what you need."

I burrow under the covers to hide and eat my fruit in peace as I scribble down items. Eventually, I fall asleep because Dad won't let that man hurt me. But just in case, I clutch onto the shotgun behind me.

I wake with my heart in my throat as someone kisses my bare stomach. My body relaxes to find Dad's warm brown eyes staring down at me. He helps me pull off my shirt and then removes the rest of my clothing. His mouth

finds mine for a chaste kiss and I can taste the whiskey on him. I want to suck it off his tongue.

“Did he leave?”

My eyes dart to the door and I relax seeing our lock in place.

“Camping in his tent outside just inside the fence,” he tells me, his mouth kissing down to my much larger breasts.

Desire pools in my core and I whimper when he sucks my nipple hard. My belly is large and in the way but it never stops him from getting what he wants. Me. He’s clever about positioning me in ways that aren’t awkward or hurtful.

His palms rub over the swell of my stomach in a possessive, reverent way. He kisses the flesh and whispers to our baby. My heart melts each time he does it. By the time his mouth latches onto my clit, I’m so horny I can’t think straight. Being pregnant means I want sex all the time. Dad is happy to oblige.

He sucks and nibbles and teases until I’m thrashing with need. I grip his hair and beg for more.

“Please…” My moan is loud. “I need you.”

“Come for me, baby. I’ll fuck you as soon as you come.”

His words have their intended affect because I start trembling. When he sucks one last hard time, I lose myself to a glorious orgasm. I’ve barely quit shaking when he sits back on his heels. He grabs my hips and hauls me closer.

“You’re so beautiful,” he murmurs, his palm rubbing over my stomach. “I love you.”

I smile, ready to return the sentiment, but then he’s driving into me at this odd angle that only seems to work well when pregnant. His cock hits me deep and shudders wrack through me.

“Oh, God.” I’m helpless as he holds my hips up and bucks against me. All I can do is sit up on my elbows and watch him. I can’t see where he’s entering me because of my large stomach but I can see the way his chest muscles flex with each movement. I lick my lips and practically drool over the way his biceps bulge as he holds me up. His dark hair hangs in his eyes, dripping with sweat, and his full lips are parted as he fucks.

He’s my beast.

Delicious and gorgeous and wild.

At this angle, I lose control and orgasm without warning. This causes him to grunt out my name before draining his own release inside of me. He pulls out and stares at me with a domineering glint in his eyes.

I am his.

He owns me.

And I'd never argue that because I love being his.

I'm safe with him.

Always.

The next morning is awkward. Atticus is no longer looking at me in a sad way but instead with pity. I watch him, his jaw tightening, as if he's physically keeping words in. It makes me curious. Why the sudden change?

Since the weather is nice, we all three go down to the river. Atticus has a net and he's convinced he can catch us some fish. The water is icy-cold but it's Dad who wants to use the net. We stand on the river banks watching my father wade out into the chilly river cursing about how cold it is.

"You're pregnant." Atticus's words are clipped and low.

I frown and look over at him. "I am."

"How old are you?"

Glaring, I huff. "Seventeen. How old are you?"

"Thirty-six. Can I ask you something?"

Nervously, I twist my wedding band around my finger. Something tells me I won't like his line of questioning. His jade-green eyes dart to my fingers and he curses under his breath.

"Is Reed the father?" he asks, his voice husky and disgusted.

"He is. Do you have a problem with that?" I challenge.

Our eyes meet and he frowns. "That's incest, sweetheart."

My lip curls up. "It's none of your business."

He grumbles and crosses his giant arms over his chest. "It is my business if I think you were coerced. I think you're a little brainwashed, Devon. Last night, I heard you two. Fucking like wild animals. That's not normal." He swallows and shakes his head. "Sleeping with your father is

not normal. Not to mention, it's highly fucking illegal in the state of Alaska."

Dad hoots that he almost caught a fish. I beam at him and hold my thumb up before regarding Atticus.

"The laws don't matter here. We love each other. This is our home." I clutch my stomach and smile. "This is our baby. We're happy."

"You'll be happy until the moment that baby comes out," he tells me in a low voice. "Don't you know what incest does to people?"

My blood runs cold because I don't know what it does to people. "What do you mean?" I hate that I'm entertaining him by asking questions on the matter.

He scrubs at his cheek. "Birth defects."

Panic nearly stops my heart in my chest. "Wh-What?"

"Blood relatives who reproduce are extremely likely to give birth to a child with issues. Most of them mental issues but some can be physical. I've lived out here in the wilderness long enough to see firsthand what incest does to families." He pauses and looks at me with sadness flickering in his eyes. "The squatters who hurt you, did they seem normal?"

I shiver and stare down at the rocks at my feet. They were wild and lost. No humanity in their eyes. Madness lived within them.

Will my baby be mad too?

Bile rises in my throat and the world seems to spin. Atticus clutches my elbow.

"Are you okay?" he demands, concern in his tone.

"I think I'm going to be sick."

I've barely spilled the words out before Dad comes splashing back. With cold, wet arms, he scoops me into his grip. Tears burn in my eyes as he carries me back to the cabin. Atticus stays outside as Dad helps me undress and puts me under the covers.

"What can I do to make you feel better?" he questions as he strokes away the hair from my clammy forehead.

Tell me everything is going to be okay.

Pinky promise that we're not going to have a baby with problems.

A sob catches in my throat but I swallow it down. I don't want him to see me upset about our baby. Despite the worry niggling at me, I still want our baby. We made this baby together out of love.

"Get some rest, Pip," he says, a soft smile on his lips.

Two long weeks pass by with Atticus overstaying his welcome. Sure, he's great at teaching Dad some new survival techniques and they're quite chummy which warms my heart to see Dad happy, but I'm unnerved. I can't stop obsessing over my child. As Dad chops firewood, Atticus takes the moment to talk to me again. I've been avoiding him so the fact that we're alone stresses me out.

"What?" I snap.

He sits at the table and reads through my list. "Do you want me to bring a book about inbreeding?"

A choked sound escapes me. "No."

"Look, Devon. If you want to leave, I can get you out of here. All you have to do is say the words. I'll go back to town and get the police involved. You're underage. They call that statutory rape. Are you familiar with that term?"

I scoff. "He did not rape me!"

He holds his hands up in defense. "I understand how you, having gone through what you did, would see it that way. But he did take advantage of you in the wilderness. He shouldn't be having sex with you every goddamn night." He grits his teeth together as if he's disgusted. "He shouldn't have gotten you pregnant."

"Just leave us alone," I beg. "Don't get anyone involved. It's our business. We're happy."

He frowns. "I'll be back in about two weeks with the supplies. I'll bring you some reading material on the subject. When I come back, all you have to do is give me the word. We'll leave and I'll get you the help you need. There are therapists who can help and—"

"Get me my stuff but I don't need the other things you speak of. If my baby has problems, I'll deal with it then. You're overstepping, Atticus. Now please back the hell away from us." My gaze is venom-filled.

He sighs and nods. "It's never too late to change your mind."

"Duly noted," I seethe.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

reed

With Atticus gone, I can breathe easier. I didn't like the looks he gave me when he thought I wasn't aware. Disgust and disapproval. He knows my daughter and I are having a baby. That we have sex and love each other. But with my warning glares, he knows not to involve anyone. I'll kill anyone who tries to take her away from me, and that's a motherfucking promise.

He's been gone for days now. When I told him about the girl at the shack, he wanted to go check on her. I gave him directions and that should be the last we'll see of him until he returns with many much-needed items.

Devon is in a weird mood—has been ever since he showed up. I'd thought she'd snap out of it but she's lost inside her head. I've given her time but I'm losing my patience.

"What's wrong?" I ask after a long hard day of building the frame on our cabin extension.

She furiously stitches on another pelt to her baby blanket. "Nothing."

Liar.

When she was a kid, I always knew when she was lying. Her lips would twitch on one side. With a sigh, I peel off my shirt and kick off my shoes. I'm sweaty and in desperate need of a bath. As if sensing this, she abandons her blanket to prepare some water for me. I sit in my chair and she silently begins washing me.

"Why won't you look at me? What's going on in that pretty head of yours?"

She shrugs and runs the rag low on my stomach. It irritates me that she's blowing me off. I grip her wrist and haul her to me so that our faces are close. Her blue eyes are wide with surprise.

"Sit down and tell me what the fuck is going on," I demand.

She swallows and throws the rag into the bowl with a splash. When she attempts to primly sit on the edge of my knee, I growl before pulling her to straddle my hips facing me. The shirt she's wearing stretches over her stomach that has our growing baby inside. Her legs are bare and her pussy is free. Just the way I love having her. A shiver runs through her when I tug off her shirt so I can see all of what's mine.

"I love seeing you pregnant with our child," I praise as my palms cup her big tits and even bigger stomach. "It makes me want to put many more babies inside of you."

When I lift my gaze to grin at her, she's frowning.

"Atticus told me incest could lead to birth defects," she blurts out. Her bottom lip wobbles and tears well in her eyes. "What if something is wrong with our baby?"

Anger surges inside of me. I didn't realize that motherfucker put horrible ideas inside of her when I wasn't paying attention. If he were here right now, I'd run my fist right through his nose. He's causing problems that aren't his to worry about.

"Our baby will be fine," I vow as I try to take her pinky.

She swats it away. "But how do you know that?" Furious tears roll down her pink cheeks and splash her tits.

"Because we've endured too much to have something ruin our happiness. Our baby will be just perfect. You shouldn't worry about that shit," I snap.

Her lip snarls up in fury. "I have to worry!" Her voice is shrill and on edge. "This is our baby! Don't you fucking care?!"

I grab her jaw in my brutal grip and jerk her to me so that our noses touch. "I. Fucking. Care. Don't ever accuse me of not caring, goddammit. I've cared for you since the day I held you in my arms. Why the hell would I stop now?" I seethe.

She sobs as she tries to break free from my hold. I'll be damned if I let her go. "You knew this could happen," she accuses. "You fucked me knowing we could have a messed-up baby."

"Do not talk to me that way," I spit out. "This wasn't some goddamn plan to ruin your life. Jesus, Devon! Who the hell do you think I am?"

She's pissed and hysterical. Her fingernails claw at my wrist until I let her jaw go. Then, she beats me with her tiny fists. When my lip splits open

from her knuckle, I've had enough. I reach behind her and whip her round ass. This only makes her lose her shit more.

"I hate you! You did this on purpose! You knew!" Her sobs are maniacal as she slaps and claws at me.

I smack her ass again. "I didn't do anyfuckingthing on purpose!" I roar. "The only damn thing I'm guilty of is loving you when I shouldn't!"

She falls against my chest, her entire body shaking as she cries. I wrap my arms around her and kiss her hair. Our sweet, perfect baby rolls in her belly between us. Pride surges through me.

This.

Baby.

Is.

Perfect.

I feel it down to my toes.

"I swear to you that everything is going to be okay, baby," I whisper.

She sniffles as she holds out her pinky. I grab it without hesitation and I hold onto it. My promises don't break.

Not to Devon.

Devon is my everything.

"I don't like him," Devon tells me as she helps me collect river rocks to use for the fireplace I plan on building. Buddy has gone exploring—hunting if I had to guess—so he's nowhere to be found. That dog gets braver by the day.

"You don't have to like him, Pip. But he's bringing us supplies we'll need for the baby. Have you thought of any names?"

Her head bows and she shrugs. "Maybe. I don't want to get too excited."

Reaching forward, I tilt her chin up with my fingers. "Why not?"

"Because…" Her nostrils flare and her lip wobbles. "I don't want to have named it and then it have something wrong with it. If this baby dies too, I won't be able to take it, Reed."

I clench my teeth. When Atticus comes back, he and I are going to have a long discussion about him filling her head with all this stupid shit that worries her from sun up to sun down.

“Our baby is safe and healthy. We feel it moving around all the time. It won’t be long and I’ll prove it to you,” I assure her.

She’s frowning when she freezes. “Dad…”

Slowly, I turn around and a bear swats at the water trying to catch a fish not fifty yards away. I pull out my .45 and point toward the cabin. “Devon, go.”

Her fingers clutch at my shirt. “No. I won’t leave you.”

With her big belly brushing against my back, I’m overwhelmed with the desire to protect her and our child at all costs. We remain still and quiet as not to alert the bear. But after some time, it stands on its hind legs and sniffs the air. It turns and sees us, a low growl in its throat. This time, I don’t wait, I stalk it. With my arm raised and unmoving, I fire at it.

Pop! Pop! Pop!

All three shots pierce its skull. The bear collapses into the water. It’s then, I see two cubs playing in the trees beyond the shore.

“Devon, you need to go home. I need to do something you’re not going to like,” I mutter before gritting my teeth.

“What—” Her breath catches when she sees them. “No. Dad, no. They’re little. We can keep them as pets and teach them.”

I turn and clutch the side of her neck. My lips find hers and I kiss her softly. “I’m sorry, baby, but no. It doesn’t work that way out here. These are wild animals.”

She starts to cry but I don’t have time to coddle her. These animals, if let go, will grow into beasts that will hurt my girl and our baby.

I stride over to them and with two pops, I end them.

I’m sorry, Pip.

The days turn into weeks and Devon and I are both on edge knowing Atticus will arrive soon. With his return, it brings both excitement and

stress. If he sells us out, he might even bring the law.

I hope they bring firepower because I will not go down without a fight.

This life is ours.

We do what we want.

Devon's stomach is gigantic. Tiny silvery marks line the sides like someone painted stripes on her. She's never been one to be vain and hasn't mentioned them. But I love looking at them. They're evidence her body is stretching and expanding to accommodate our child. She's tiny and there's no doubt this kid is going to be big like his father. This worries me but I vowed to her that I wouldn't let it consume me. We'll deal with it when the time comes. Until then, we cherish each day together.

Each morning, I laze around later and later because it's the time of day when our little cub is the most active. Her stomach bulges and moves while she sleeps. It's our quiet moment, just me and the baby, alone. I tell the little angel what a great mother Devon will be. How she's fierce and brave and beautiful. And that they will be smart just like her.

"My back hurts," Devon murmurs, her voice thick with sleep.

"Sit up and let me massage it."

It takes some effort but she manages to pull herself upright. She sweeps her long messy hair to the side and bares her naked back to me. From behind, you'd never be able to tell she was pregnant. With firm motions, I knead her lower back muscles. Carrying this child is hard on her body. I do my best to alleviate her pain whenever possible.

Soon, the massage turns sexual as it always does. When we touch, our bodies seem to thrum with an electric pulse that draws us together. Her head tilts back and she leans against me. I wrap my arms around her to touch her breasts that are large as they prepare to feed our baby. Her nipples are erect and sometimes leak with a liquid that I think has something to do with breastmilk. We aren't for sure but I like to taste it. I like to taste all of her.

Sliding my hand along her ass crack, I cup her from beneath. My fingers slip easily into her wet pussy. It feels hotter and tighter than usual. She must enjoy her body's new physiological changes because as soon as my fingers are inside her, she starts whimpering and shaking. I fuck her hole with two fingers until they're soaked with her juices. Then, I urge her to lie back down on her side while I continue to massage her insides with my hand. The moment she comes, soft and breathy, I slide my fingers out

and guide my cock inside of her. Her body grips mine in a way that has me losing all sense of reality.

“I love you,” I murmur, my hot breath on her shoulder.

“I love you too.” Her words are garbled and stolen by her pleasure.

I slip my wet finger between the crack of her ass and tease her puckered hole. She’s used to me taking her here often and her body is relaxed as I push one and then the other finger inside her. I like when she’s filled up with me in every way possible.

“Oh, God,” she whimpers.

“Come all over my cock, baby girl. I want you to make such a fucking mess.”

My words, like usual, turn her on. Her body trembles and quakes. I know the moment she loses herself to an orgasm because hot juices soak my cock. Now that she’s pregnant, her body gets so much more aroused and she drenches me every time. The first time it happened, she was embarrassed, but when I licked it all away and praised her on how delicious she was, she stopped worrying.

My nuts seize up in pleasure and I groan as my cum surges inside of her. Her body is tight around mine and she’s still moaning. I buck against her until my cock is drained and softening. Then, I slip my fingers out of her before easing my cock out. We make a mess and I love it.

“I think I’m going to go down to the river and haul some more rocks up here,” I tell her, my lips pressing kisses on her shoulders. “Then I thought we could—”

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Buddy barks from the corner of the cabin he’d been sleeping in and his hackles raise as he growls at the door.

I jolt up, my dripping dick flopping against my leg and lunge for my shotgun. I push it out in front of me and point at the door. “Who’s there?” I bellow.

Chick-chuck!

I load the shotgun and then someone speaks.

“Whoa, Reed. Don’t go blowing off my head. It’s me, Atticus.”

Buddy starts wagging his tail and barks happily. I look over my shoulder at Devon. Her brows are pulled together in a frown.

“Get dressed and eat breakfast, baby,” I say to her and then to him. “I’ll be right out!”

I kneel before her and kiss her mouth hard. “Don’t let it bother you. It’s you and me. Nothing will tear apart our love, okay?”

She swallows and nods, her eyes flickering with trust. I grab her pinky with mine and she smiles. Once I’m dressed, I trot outside. Buddy follows after me and runs off into the thicket, no doubt after his breakfast. Atticus leans against a tree wearing a scowl.

“Supplies are up there. It’s going to take us all day to unload the trailer and haul each item down here,” he says, his jaw clenching.

“Let’s get on it then.” My tone is frigid.

He hands me a protein bar. Instead of eating it, I run it inside to gift it to Devon. I steal one more kiss. “We’re going to unload. You rest, beautiful.”

When I get back out, he shakes his head and hands me another bar. “Eat this one,” he grunts. “You’ll need your energy. We have a long day ahead of us.”

Together, in silence, we hike up the side of the mountain about halfway between the cabin and the shack where I left the girl. The trek isn’t as steep through here but it’s still one Devon would never be able to make in her pregnant state. When we finally reach the top and I see his big Ford-250 with a trailer attached, I can’t help but smile. It’s filled with supplies we desperately need. More ammunition and guns. Dishes and silverware. Medical supplies and medicines. Baby items. Books. Food. So much stuff that it’s going to be difficult getting it all down. But the look on Devon’s face will be worth it.

Before we even start, I cross my arms over my chest and level him with a glare. It’s not even noon and the sun is hot today. I could probably even take Devon swimming for a bit if she were up to it.

“We need to talk.”

His brow lifts and he leans his hip against the truck. “About you fucking and knocking up your daughter. Let’s talk.”

I grit my teeth and fist my hands. “It’s not so fucking black and white.”

He grunts. “Whatever, man. It’s your business. As long as she’s not here as your fucked-up prisoner, I’ll do my best to ignore it. But know that it doesn’t sit right with me. When we met at the closing, all you could do was talk about how proud you were of your daughter. How she was going to go off to college in a couple of years and was going to do great shit. The look on your face was one a normal father should look like when talking about his daughter. Fast forward to now…” He shakes his head and his nostrils

flare. “She’s pregnant with your kid. Scared of her own shadow. And you two fuck all hours of the day. It’s sick, man. Not just illegal but fucking immoral. You’ve taken advantage of the fact that she’s young and doesn’t know about this shit. *But I know.* I know that incest can fuck up your kids.”

I growl and he shrugs.

“I’m just telling you my stance. But so help me if she even shows an inkling of wanting to leave here, I’ll snap her up and haul her back to town. Drop her confused ass on Child Protective Services’ doorstep. I’ll send the cops back to deal with you.” His green eyes narrow at me. “The only reason I haven’t done that shit is because she seems happy and severely dependent on you. I’m not a homewrecker. The last thing I need on my conscience is destroying a family that wanted to be together.”

“You take her and I’ll hunt you down,” I vow through gritted teeth. “I’ll fucking gut you and slit the throats of anyone who tries to take her from me.”

He shakes his head and opens the back gate of the trailer. “I get your need to protect her. She’s your daughter. But I’m just warning you that I’ll take my chances with your psychotic ass if it means protecting her from something she doesn’t want.”

I grab a crate of canned goods and level him with a serious stare. “And I’m just warning you that my psychotic ass will protect her from anyone who thinks they know what’s better for my daughter than I do. Things are different out here, Atticus. I’m not the man you sold this land to. I am not your friend. The only friend I have is the one carrying my child down there. So don’t get any wild ideas. I will stop at nothing to protect her. Fucking nothing.”

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

devon

They keep bringing more and more stuff. So much stuff we have nowhere to put it. It gets stacked on top of the tubs in one corner that we'd brought from the crash site. I don't like Atticus in our home, nor do I like the way he tries to pass on secret messages with his eyes. I simply don't like him trying to mess up my happiness. When he drops a box down in front of me full of new books I haven't read, a squeal of excitement escapes me. They head off to unload more crap and I dive into my box marveling over the new romance stories. I pick up one book and frown in confusion. It doesn't look like romance. As soon as I read the title, my heart rate thunders in my chest.

Incest in the Wild.

I throw it away from me as if it's covered in poison. Hot tears well in my eyes and on instinct, I clutch my huge stomach as if to protect my baby. For what feels like forever, I sob as I stare in horror at the book. When my tears finally dry, anger takes over.

How dare he keep sticking his nose where he shouldn't?

With a choked, furious sound, I snap the book up and ready myself to throw it in the fire. But before I can fling it away, a festering begins deep inside of me. Maybe I should read it just so I know what I'm up against. What to expect. I'm going to love this child no matter what but I feel like I owe it to him or her to see what we'll be dealing with.

I swallow down bile in my throat as I open the book.

Page after page, I greedily read up the knowledge. What I learn disgusts and terrifies me. I'm afraid, more so than before. So many complications. So many potential mental problems.

When the door flies open, I screech and guiltily toss the book back into the box. Dad takes one look at my tear-stained face and rushes to my side. His arms are sweaty but protective. He searches my body with his palms as if he can find what's hurting me.

It's my heart.

It aches and bleeds for our future.

He can't fix it.

Only God can.

And for the terrible things we've done, I'm afraid God has turned his back on us.

"Baby," he coos. "Tell me what's wrong."

I accept his deep kiss and my heart calms some. Dad will do anything to protect me and the baby. He loves us deeply. I'm letting Atticus and his stupid book get to me. Together, Dad and I can make this work, no matter what happens.

"Nothing. Pregnancy hormones. I think I'm just too hot and sweaty," I say with a ragged sigh.

His mouth finds my neck and he kisses me. "I'm going to take a break to take you swimming. As much as I'd love to see you naked always, I don't want that motherfucker seeing you. Can you wear your black swimsuit? You know I love that one on you. I always have."

I turn to meet his heat-filled gaze. He admitted to being aroused by me before we left to come out here in our hot tub. It makes me wet thinking that he got an erection simply from looking at me. When he was married to Mom. When those thoughts were a lot more dangerous there than here.

"Okay," I agree with a smile.

His eyes burn with need—a need I wish I could fulfill, but we have a stupid, nosy visitor.

Twenty minutes later, we're headed to the river. Unfortunately for us, Atticus tags along. I think he's watching and waiting for an opportunity to talk to me alone again. I refuse to let that happen. As Dad carries me into the river wearing boxers only, I cling to him. Maybe if we ignore Atticus, he'll go away.

"Oh my God!" I shriek. "It's so cold!"

It's freezing, but my pregnant self is already so hot all the time and it's barely spring. We dip under the rushing water and I moan in relief. After an entire winter of sponge baths, it's nice to get submerged. We bathe at first

with some soap and shampoo. Then, we spend hours lazing in the river. Atticus eventually sits on the river banks and rummages in his backpack.

“I need you,” I whisper to Dad as I wrap my thighs around his waist. My belly is squished between us but I can still kiss him.

He doesn’t argue as we make out. Simply pulls his hard cock out. I help him by moving my swimsuit to the side. When he pushes into me, I cry out in pleasure. Atticus shakes his head and refuses to look at us. I float back with my legs wrapped around Dad and lose myself to the sensations. His palms greedily tear at my top until I’m free for him to maul. My breasts are soon in his mouth as he sucks and bites at the flesh. It makes my pussy clench around him, desperate to come.

Like animals, we fuck in the river.

Two savages.

Wild and free.

Bound by love and our growing offspring.

“What are you going to do with those three bearskins?” Atticus asks as we roast some hot dogs he brought in his ice chest. Their savory scent has my mouth watering. After nearly a year of meat and the occasional canned fruit or vegetable, I’m ravenous for the stuff he brought. Something as simple as the grapes in his pack seem too good to be true. Both men laughed when I claimed the bag for my own.

“Devon wants to make more carpet for the expansion,” Dad tells him as he pulls my hot dog off the stick and presses it into a bun. He hands it to me and I don’t fool with condiments. I simply devour it.

“I could help you with the extension,” Atticus tells him. “With the two of us, it shouldn’t take any more than a couple of weeks.”

They lose themselves to conversation about measurements and design but I frown as I eat the rest of my food. I thought he’d deliver our supplies and then leave. Unfortunately, he’s back to wearing out his welcome. He’s long since stopped side-eyeing me. Ever since Dad fucked me in the river within earshot, Atticus has seemed to give up on his quest to save me from

a situation I don’t need saving from. I’m thankful for the supplies he brought us but I still am unhappy about the book. So when he suggests sleeping in the cabin with us, I screech in protest.

“No,” Dad tells him firmly. “You have your tent. I’m sorry but she doesn’t feel safe around men.”

Atticus shrugs as if it doesn’t bother him. He didn’t want to sleep in the cabin. He just wanted to stress me out.

“What happened today?” Dad asks. “I know something happened.”

Guilt rises in my throat and I try to turn away from him. “It’s stupid. Nothing.”

He pulls me onto my back and hooks his thigh over mine to keep me from rolling away. His massive palm covers my lower belly. The baby nudges him and we both smile for a moment, distracted from our conversation.

“It was Atticus. He said something to you, didn’t he?” His brows are furrowed together in concern. Sometimes I try to remember him back at the house in San Francisco. Was he always this good looking? Without all the facial hair and feral glares, was he still hot?

My mind drifts to one of the nights leading up to our arrival here. When we camped out somewhere in Canada along the way.

“Your turn,” Dad says as he draws a card. It’s pouring down rain and I wish we could go to the campground pool. Instead, we’re stuck inside while Mom sleeps. We’ve played more card games than I can count. With a yawn, I stretch my legs out under the table and rest them on top of his thighs.

I frown at my cards as I decide what I'm going to play. Dad sets his hand down and starts massaging my bare feet in his lap. I bite on my bottom lip as I try to focus on what cards to put down but I can't ignore the way excitement seems to pulsate from how he's touching me. It kind of tickles when he kneads the bottom of my feet but mostly it feels good. I like that his hands are giant compared to my small feet. He leans his head back while he waits but continues to rub my feet.

I take the moment to stare at him over my cards. His Adam's apple protrudes from his throat with his head leaned back. The grey T-shirt he wears fits him well and showcases his lean yet fit body. His dark hair is wild and messy on top of his head.

A smile plays at my lips.

We're finally headed to the great outdoors. We'll get to do this stuff all the time. No stress. No school. No work. No worries. Normally, I detest my mother's behavior but right now I'm thankful she gives us so many moments alone.

"Mmm," I let out a surprised moan. His hands on my feet feel too good.

His head jerks back up and his stare bores a hole through me. I frown when he clenches his jaw as though he's angry, but he doesn't let me go. It's awkward staring at him but I refuse to look away. I love his undivided attention. When his fingertips slide up from my feet, brushing along my ankle bones under the bottoms of my jeans, I gasp in surprise. It feels intimate with his fingers on my lower legs beneath my jeans.

I'm still staring at him, admiring his ruggedly handsome face when he clears his throat.

"I need a beer. You want anything?"

I pull my feet away. "I'll get it, Dad. Stay put."

He flashes me a relieved smile that I don't understand when I bounce off to get us something to drink. I pop open a beer for him and set it on the table. And then, not-so-innocently, I walk over to my bag on the sofa and rummage around for some more comfortable clothes. I can feel his stare on me as he sips his beer.

I unbutton my jeans and push them down my thighs. Over my shoulder, I flash him a smile. "I need my yoga pants," I tell him as if that's the most normal reason in the world for a girl to undress in front of her father.

He takes another swallow and gives me a nod. His gaze tears from mine but as soon as I turn back, I can feel it on me. I'm slow in my movements as

I kick off my jeans and then bend to pick them up. My panties are wet and this is probably sick but right now I'm pretending this trip is just for us. I always feel so safe and connected to him.

"Actually," I say with a breathy laugh. "It's hot. I think I'll wear shorts."

I peel off my hoodie and toss it away. I'm standing in a tank top and my panties in front of my dad. He doesn't argue or get on to me. He doesn't say a word. My nipples are hard because this feels dirty and wrong but I like it. I find the shortest pair of skintight cotton shorts I own and slide those up my hips. Once I'm dressed, I turned to catch him averting his gaze. I walk over to the fridge and grab myself a beer too just to rile Dad up.

When I return, we're quiet as we finish our card game. I prop my right foot back on his thigh and he absently rubs at it and my leg as far up as my knee. I'm so turned on by Dad's innocent touches that I know I'm going to get off tonight once they've gone to bed.

The hours tick by and we play a card game neither of us are interested in. He eventually gets up and rolls out the sofa bed for me. I stare at his lean body as he moves. I'm becoming unhealthily obsessed with staring at him.

"Don't go to bed yet," I murmur as I stand. I'm desperate to keep him here with me. "I'll read to you. Alaskan wilderness boring facts. It'll be fun."

He turns and glances toward his room before looking down at me. Indecision wars in his eyes. A month ago, he'd have sat down without hesitation. Something is up with him.

"Please," I beg. "I'm bored. You entertain me."

A smile tugs at one corner of his lips. "Fine. Bore me *until I fall asleep."*

He stretches out on the bed and pats the blankets. With a grin that matches his, I crawl in next to him. He lies on his side and I stay on my back. I grab the book from the floor and begin reading out loud to him. His breathing eventually evens out as he falls asleep. I turn toward him and selfishly stare at him. While sleeping, he's younger than his forty years. He could easily pass for thirty. I let my fingertips whisper over his shoulder and up to his jaw. Dad and I have always been affectionate but this feels different. Taboo, maybe. He doesn't know I'm touching him in a wanting, intimate way. If he woke up, he might be angry. Eventually, a big yawn has

me sleepy. I curl up against his warm chest and nearly squeal with delight when his arm wraps around me in a possessive sleepy hug. I fall asleep almost instantly.

"Devon, baby, talk to me." His voice is exactly the same. Concerned and caring. Full of love. We're the same two people—just a whole bunch of crap happened between then and now.

I open my eyes, blinking away my memory, and smile at him. "I love you."

His features soften and he kisses my mouth. "I love you. You know this."

"Before we ever came on this trip, my feelings for you had started to evolve. More than how a girl adores her father. Deeper. Darker. Forbidden. Do you think had we not come out here it would have happened anyway?" I ask, my voice soft.

His eyes narrow as he considers my question. "I don't know."

Lies.

The guilt on his face tells me it would have.

"Dad," I smirk. "I mean, Reed. Tell me. Would it have happened?"

He swallows and stares off in a daze. "I was pretty horrified when I touched you that night. But the more I thought about it, the more I was secretly glad it happened. I imagine that at the rate we were going, something may have happened between us. Your mother was pushing us together whether she realized it or not. We were both desperate for her love and affection and when she denied us, we turned to each other." He grunts and meets my gaze with shame in his eyes. "It's horrible, Devon. We were having the beginnings of feelings no father and daughter should have for each other. Had they been one-sided, it would have been easier to deny. But we both were falling in too deep. I'm sorry I'm a pedophile of a father but I'm not sorry about us. This baby. Our sexual relationship. Our love. All the components make for one messy design but it's one I'm happy with nonetheless, no matter the consequences."

His ability to throw everything out the window for me warms my heart. Decision calms me to my core. I sit up and rummage through the box. When I hand him the book, he growls. I turn to face him and straddle his hips.

“I want to burn it.”

His features darken. “You sure?” I can feel him growing hard between my legs.

“Now.”

Without hesitation, he tosses the book straight into the fireplace and together we watch it catch fire. I lift up and accept his thick cock into my receptive body that belongs only to him.

While we fuck like father and daughter shouldn’t but do, we watch the damn incest book burn to dust.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

reed

Atticus, while I was pissed at him at first, has become a good friend. I know he hates what Devon and I have. In fact, he strongly advises against it any chance he gets. But he also helps us. Instead of dumping the supplies and leaving, he's stayed for nearly three weeks helping me with the addition. With another strong, able body, we're able to fly through it. Each day Devon grows bigger and more miserable. At one point, she dragged everything from the cave and now spends a lot of time lying on the cool stone. We don't have a good timetable but we know she could give birth any day. I'm thrilled and fucking terrified.

"I'm going to go check on Eve and then I'll come back in a month to check on you guys. I'll bring stuff you might need and if you need more, let me know then." He shoulders his backpack and scrubs at his face.

"Eve?" a growl rumbles in my chest. "Who the fuck is Eve?"

His jaw clenches. "The girl. In the shack."

I'm surprised she's still alive.

"You're going to take her to town? Call Child Protective Services?" I ask.

He frowns and shakes his head. "I offered to take her to town last time. She nearly gutted me with a shiv. Demanded fruit. So, I'm bringing her fruit."

"She's only what twelve? Thirteen?"

"Something like that, but you know how it is out here in the wild. You get used to it. The outside world seems too big. Too loud. I just…" His features darken. "She reminds me of my little sister. And since she has no family to look after her, I feel like I ought to at least check in on her."

I let out a frustrated sigh. “Tell her she is welcome to visit us if she wants. I know Devon would like to talk to another girl. I was too upset back then but I wouldn’t hurt her now.”

He nods as if he approves of my words. “I’ll pass it along. And Reed?”

“Yeah?”

“If you’re going to be having babies, you’re going to need something a little better constructed than your cabin. I can put together some plans to frame out a real house up top.” He points above the tree line where our original home was supposed to be. “I know you have the money and I can get the tools and supplies. It might take a year if we have help. Longer if just the two of us.”

I cut him off. “Just us. I’m all about building a safer structure for my family but I don’t want anyone on my land but you and the little brown-haired girl. I’ll put a bullet through the skull of anyone who trespasses.”

He nods and holds out his hand. “Good luck. I’ll see you soon.”

I shake his hand and then he’s off.

Once I can’t see his retreating frame any longer, I go back inside our much bigger cabin. We cut into the far wall where our bed normally is and made that the opening into the new space. Our bed has been moved to the farthest corner beside the river rock fireplace we built. We’ll still keep the RV oven fireplace for the front room but this one will work nicely for the back. It’s much larger and can hold a bigger fire.

Devon is busy organizing our cabin. She sits on the bed, that now is about two feet higher off the ground since Atticus and I built a frame for it, and folds baby clothes. A smile has her full lips turned up and she’s at peace. With my hands on my hips, I stare at her. Boxes and tubs are everywhere but she seems happy to be unloading everything.

“He’s gone?” she asks when she notices my presence. Our eyes meet and hers twinkle with love.

“Off to see Eve.”

“Eve?” Her nose scrunches up.

“The girl at the shack.”

She presses her lips together and nods. “If she’s safe, I don’t mind us looking after her.”

“I think she’s safe but she’s a loner. Atticus says she prefers to stay at the shack.”

“Okay, then. Maybe we should bring her some food or clothes. I feel bad she’s out there all alone,” she says. She abandons the clothes and eases out of the bed. Her palms clutch onto her giant stomach that is covered in her new summer maternity dress Atticus bought. She prefers being naked but since we had a visitor, she had to remain clothed. I’m dying to rip it from her ripe body and kiss her bare belly.

“We can do that,” I assure her.

We hug and I inhale her hair that smells like apples after our most recent river bath. I could devour this woman from sun up to sun down.

“I’ve been reading a lot in the book Atticus brought,” she murmurs.

I grab her jaw and tilt her head up. Her brows are furled together.

“Another incest book?” My jaw clenches in anger.

“No,” she breathes, worry flickering in her eyes briefly. “The one about at-home natural childbirth. It’s scary.”

I kiss her supple lips. “Don’t be afraid. We’ve got this. You’re strong and capable. I won’t let you die on my watch, Pip.”

Her nostrils flare and the tip of her nose turns red. “I wasn’t worried about me. I was worried about the baby.”

“The baby will be fine. People had babies in the wild all the time before modern medicine.”

She swallows. “And if it has something wrong with it… complications…from the incest…” Fat tears spill from her eyes. “Promise me you’ll put it out of its misery. I won’t be able to. I’m too selfish. You’ll need to be the one to do it.”

My chest aches. “Devon. Listen to me. Nothing will be wrong with this baby. Trust me. The incest scare is nothing but bullshit. Shouldn’t even be something for you to worry about. When have I ever steered you wrong?”

“Never.”

“I always promised I’d protect you no matter what. You have to trust that. Everything I do is for your well-being and the sake of keeping your heart intact. If there was something to worry about, I’d be the one doing all the worrying. I’m fine. Excited and slightly nervous but that’s because I haven’t held an infant in so long.”

She smiles. “Since me and Drew.”

My stomach does a flop inside me. “We’re doing this. We will continue to do this the rest of our lives. We are a team. We’ve been that way for as long as I can remember.”

A long sigh escapes her. “You’re right. I’m done worrying over it.”

“Good. Now take off your clothes and let me see your pretty pussy.”

She squeals but my good girl always obeys.

“So. Many. Boxes.” Sweat sticks to her face as she hobbles around the space trying to organize shit. From what I read in the pregnancy book, she’s nesting. It means the baby should be here soon. My heart leaps at the thought of holding our infant in my arms.

Every night I pray to a God, who has probably forsaken me, that she and our baby will be okay. I hope he loves the innocent—and she and our baby are definitely innocent—because I won’t survive if anything happens to them.

I need them to be okay.

“Tomorrow we should start tilling for the garden,” she tells me as she bends over to rummage in a box. I’m beat after a day of hard labor and am content to watch her cute ass as it jiggles each time she moves.

“We can do that. Atticus brought enough seeds for us to plant from here to Seattle,” I say with a laugh.

She turns and smirks. “I’m excited for a garden. Fresh tomatoes and cucumbers. Oh God, that sounds like heaven.”

My cock twitches at hearing her moan in delight. “You’re cute as fuck all domesticated.”

Her cheeks burn bright red and she gives me a shy smile. “You’re handsome as hell all barbaric.”

We both laugh.

Eventually, I drift off to sleep as she hums while she works.

This really is heaven.

“Nothing,” she pouts and then winces.

“It’s been four days, baby. Plants don’t grow overnight.”

She hobbles over to the bed and eases herself down. “My back is killing me.”

“Rest.”

“I need to get to the pile of boxes over there and—”

“Devon, rest.” My tone is firm and leaves no room for argument.

“Okay, *Dad*,” she smarts off.

It makes me want to stick my cock in her mouth.

“You know the rules,” I growl.

“Soon I’ll get to call you Daddy all the time in here,” she teases, her eyebrow arched.

God, she’s so fucking hot when she gets mouthy.

“Keep it up,” I warn.

“Or what?”

“Or I’ll shut your pretty mouth up with my dick. What do you think about that, bad girl?”

She starts laughing and her tits bounce with the movement. “If I could get down to my knees without all this pain, I’d gladly suck you off, *Daddy*.”

“Lie down and rest,” I bark out, my cock painfully hard in my jeans.

Obeying, she stretches out and rests her hands on her stomach as she watches me stalk across the cabin over to her. She bites on her bottom lip when I unzip my jeans and pull my dick into my hand. With our eyes locked, I stroke myself with my left hand. With my right, I massage her slick pussy. She whimpers and mewls and squirms. I love how wet and turned on she gets by my fingers. I know that her back hurts, so sex is out of the question, but we can both still get off.

“Oh, God, Reed,” she breathes, her eyes fluttering closed. “Yes!”

Her body jolts with a seismic orgasm just from me touching her clit. It sparks my own release and I come with a grunt. My ropy cum jets out all over her big tits, marking and claiming her as mine. It satisfies me to see her wet with me. The dirty girl runs her fingers through my spent orgasm and brings it to her plump lips. Her blue eyes blaze with lust as she sucks off the cum.

“Yum.”

I smirk. “Plenty more where that came from.”

“I can’t do this by myself, Sabrina.” My chest aches and I’m exhausted. Purely fucking exhausted. The twins are difficult as I knew they would be. Nothing prepared me for having to do it virtually alone though.

She speaks through the pillow that covers her head. Her voice is ragged and I know she’s been crying all day. “I can’t do this at all.”

With a sigh, I sit down beside her on the bed. The miscarriage—again—was not only the worst possible timing ever, but it’s only made her sink deeper into her depression. I want to help her but I fucking can’t this time. I have two little mouths in there that need feeding.

“Can you try? For me?” I beg, my own voice choked.

She rolls away so that her back is turned to me. With hot, furious tears in my eyes, I leave her all alone with her despair. I’m just headed to my office for a drink when Devon calls out to me from the nursery.

“Da.”

My heart stops beating in my chest. Drew says words all the time but Devon has yet to speak one. I storm into the bedroom, swiping away my tears as I grin at her.

“What is it?”

“Da.” She whimpers and holds her hands up. Her blonde, fuzzy hair is cute all messy from sleep. Drew sleeps like the dead but Devon wakes up in the middle of the night if she hears me up and about.

Our lives have recently developed this pattern.

She wakes up. Cries for me. And I carry her around the house while I do unimportant shit. Once she falls asleep, I tuck her back in.

“Hey, Pip.”

She beams at me, all sleepy-eyed and toothy, and my heart melts. I scoop her up and carry her to my office. Unlike her rowdy brother, Devon doesn’t run around the house and get into shit all hours of the day. She’s happy to sit in my lap and mess with whatever I’ll let her play with on my desk.

I plop down and hand her a pen and paper. Once I help her grip the pen, she scribbles on the paper, her squeals of delight a salve to my burned

heart.

How can Sabrina lie in bed and ignore all of this?

How can she throw away our opportunity to finally be parents down the toilet?

Sure, she's fucking hurting. Well, so the fuck am I. But how in the hell can she blow off these two miracles?

"Da-da-da-da!" Devon chirps as she destroys the paper. At just two years old, she's able to climb inside my heart and latch on.

People had their advice.

How to handle our situation.

And at first, I wondered how you could love someone you barely even know.

But all that gets washed away the moment a blue-eyed, smiling toddler falls asleep on your chest. You inhale the baby shampoo and count your blessings.

I wish Sabrina would wake the fuck up.

These are our children.

We're supposed to love them.

I sure as hell do.

Fast and sudden and unexpected.

But I do.

Fuck, how I do.

"Da!" Devon throws the pen before leaning back with a cute sigh.

Smiling, I press a kiss to her soft head and wiggle my fingers at her.

She latches onto my pinky with her tiny hand. "Da."

I wake in the middle of the night, the old memory tugging at my heart. It makes me wonder if our baby will have blonde hair or brown. Blue eyes or brown. Either way, I know it will be beautiful and happy.

Devon sits at the table in the other room with a plastic tub at her feet. She's flipping through papers and reading them. I stare at her for what feels like hours until I drift back to sleep.

Life is perfect.
So fucking perfect.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

devon

Reed is amused by my nesting. I'm not amused. I feel unsettled. As if I don't get everything unpacked and put where it goes, it'll never get done. I want everything perfect so that when the baby comes, we can relax.

Nervousness causes my stomach to rumble. We may never relax. If there's something wrong with the baby, we may have to move back to town. What if it needs a hospital or extra care?

Another sharp, aching back pain slices through me. I read that it could be labor pains. But I also read it could be false labor. Once my water breaks, I'll know the baby is coming. Until then, I'll wait through the pains.

Reed's snores are comforting. He works so hard each day. The house. Food. Everything. By the time he falls into bed, he passes out. I want him to rest more. Now that the cabin extension is finished, maybe he can.

I yelp when another pain snags me in its grip. It makes Buddy whimper in concern. I let out a swoosh of breath and pet him with my bare foot. "Shhhh."

He settles and I flip through pictures Mom had saved. One of Dad holding me at two years old has my heart warming. He looks so young and terrified. It melts my heart. I hunt through the pictures searching for ones when we were infants. I come up short. With a frown, I dig deeper into the box. At the very bottom, I find a sealed yellow envelope that says: Private. Do Not Open.

Curiosity gets the better of me. My eyes flicker to Dad and he still sleeps soundly. Dragging my eyes back to the envelope, I quietly tear it open. Inside is a manila envelope filled with court documents. Clipped to the front, I find a picture of a pretty blonde young teen—no older than fourteen or so—holding two baby twins.

She has my eyes.

The thought hits me hard and my heart stills in my chest.

I pluck the picture off and set it on the table. Tears well in my eyes as the betrayal sinks in. He lied to me. He lied about everything.

Adoption papers.

Loads of them.

All mumbo jumbo but in a nutshell, Abigail Hunter, gave away her rights to us to my parents.

I'm going to be sick.

Bile rises up and I quickly swallow it down.

This can't be true.

Every single worry about what incest does to babies didn't matter. Reed isn't my biological father. A pained moan rips from my chest that causes him to stir but not wake up. I feel as though my heart has been torn from me. Tears travel down my cheeks and drip down onto the papers.

No wonder Mom didn't like us.

We weren't hers.

My body trembles as I throw on my dress and stuff my feet into my boots. The pains that keep slicing across my lower back and wrapping around to my stomach are nothing in comparison to the searing, hollowing, soul-crushing pain in my heart.

I don't know where I am going.

I don't care.

But I can't stay here with him.

He's not even…we're not even…

I heft the lock out of place and push through the door. The night air is frigid and it cools my heated flesh. With sobs choking me, I push through the gate and run. I don't know where I'm going but it's far away from here and the wreckage of our lives. My boots crunch on the forest underbrush and my cries are so loud. Buddy dutifully runs ahead of me as if to kill anything that might step in my way.

I've been running for at least ten minutes when I hear it.

Pain.

Sorrow.

Devastation.

Rage.

The roar is half-man, half-animal.

It echoes through the trees and haunts me.

And it's coming for me.

It will stalk me until it captures me.

I don't want to be captured.

I want to be free.

Hate and fury and the sickening feeling of being duped my entire life fuels me on. A sharp pain hits me so hard, I stumble and nearly fall. I have to hold onto my stomach and suppress a scream until the pain passes. Once I can move again, I trudge forward although I'm much slower than before. My body trembles with my sobs.

"Devon!"

The way he says my name is a claim. A promise. A vow to love and cherish and protect. I hate the way he says it. He has no claim to me. I don't belong to him. I never did.

Our relationship was built on lies.

He let me think the most awful things about me, about us, about our baby.

"Devon!"

Another pain renders me immobile. I fall to my knees. The pain is unbearable and blinding. I'm lost to the absolute severity of it. He's closer now. I can hear his grunting. Cursing. Begging. Pleading. Crying.

Closer.

And closer.

The pain subsides and I stand on shaky legs. Step after step, I move myself forward. I've barely made it three when the slice across my midsection strikes again. Once again, I drop to my knees. I'm sobbing and desperately clutching at the earth as I crawl away from him. Every nerve ending in my body is alive and exposed and thrashing. The pain is too intense.

I'm going to die out here.

And worse yet, he's getting closer.

"N-No," I choke out as I crawl. "S-Stay away from me."

But I'm too late. Not quick enough. Like a viper, he strikes. His fist is in my hair and he's mauling me much like that bear once did. Nothing is gentle or curious. He's rough and territorial and demanding.

I cry out when he lands on the dirt behind me and jerks my head back. His strong arm wraps around my middle above my protruding belly in a

possessive way. In his arms, I feel both safe and suffocated. My mind is warring with itself. I want him but I hate him. I love him but I can't stand to be touched by him.

"Mine." His growl is fierce and intimidating. More frightening than any forest animal. "Mine."

"No!" I screech and wiggle in his grasp.

His cock is hard and intrusive against my back. I hate it. I love it. I don't want it. I do.

"Mine!"

"No!"

I'm shoved forward and I barely have a chance to steady myself with my hands before he's shoving my dress up my hips. With a rip, he tears the fabric down the back and it falls to the dirt at my wrists. I scream and kick but he's strong. Determined. Undaunted.

Another slice of pain steals my breath and my sanity. He takes this moment of weakness. Fucking takes it like it belongs to him. Like he owns every part of me. His cock rips through me as he brutally shoves his way inside. This isn't rape like those bush people—because despite my screams of horror—I still want him. This is a hostile takeover. A reminder of who I belong to.

"I hate you!" I scream but I've stopped fighting. I fall to my shoulder with my ass up in the air.

"I fucking love you!" he roars, his hips slamming hard against my backside. "You can't ever leave me! Ever!"

I sob and scream and curse him. Another painful explosion rips across my abdomen making me black out for a second.

"Mine, Devon! You're mine, goddammit! I don't give a shit about those papers!" He's crying behind me. Furious but crying. "Y-You were mine the moment she handed you to me." His voice cracks and his brutal grip on my hips lessen. He runs a gentle palm up my spine. "I don't understand it but you burrowed your way in my heart at just two years old when we got you."

We're both crying and he's fucking me slowly.

"Y-You l-let me b-believe s-something could b-be wrong w-with the b-baby," I accuse, my words garbled and messy.

He fists my hair again and jerks me upright so that his hot breath is in my ear. Everything hurts but I need him like I need air. I hate him. I love him.

“Because I wanted to protect your goddamn heart. I knew it would fucking crush you, baby. Please understand that every single damn thing I have ever done has always been for you.” He twists his grip on my hair so that our mouths meet. With an intensity I never knew existed, he devours me with a claiming kiss. His cock is deep inside me, I’m turned at an uncomfortable angle, and everything hurts like hell. And yet I’m kissing him back just as hard.

“I hate you,” I sob.

Thrust. Thrust. Thrust.

“I hate you…”

“I love you, Pip.”

“I hate you…”

Thrust. Thrust. Thrust.

“I love you so goddamned much,” he breathes against my mouth.

“I hate you.” Another sob as pain so intense ripples through me. I’m going to die. Right here. Right now. On the floor of the forest with a dick deep inside me.

And he won’t know.

He won’t know those are lies.

“Daddy,” I choke out. “I love you.”

“I know, baby. I fucking know.”

The pain that sears through me has my insides contracting so hard I think I’ll puke. Behind me, Reed comes with a feral grunt.

“Fuck!”

He’s barely pulled out when a rush of warm heat gushes out with him. We’re both stunned and I start to collapse but he grips me.

“A-Are you fucking having the baby?!” He yanks up his jeans with his free hand.

I cry in response.

“Fuck! Shit! Oh, God!”

He scoops me into his strong arms and all I can do is shake uncontrollably. I never hated him. I’m so upset and confused but I could never hate him. He’s mine. We’re cosmic and untouchable together.

I’m so dazed as he runs through the forest. My eyes are half-lidded and swollen but I soon see a shack. He charges up to it and with a powerful kick, he blasts the door off and into the house.

A girl shrieks from the back but he doesn’t seem bothered. He lays me down on some blankets that are in front of the fireplace.

“Eve!” he roars. “Help!”

He kneels in front of me and urges my thighs apart. When he looks down between them, his eyes widen in horror.

“What?!” I demand, my voice shrill. Terror overcomes me and I try to look past my stomach to see.

“Lie back,” he orders, his tone abrupt. “The baby is coming. Just lie the fuck back, Devon.”

A small girl stares at me in shock. Her wild brown hair is a mess and her eyes are wide. He barks out orders to her. Water. Towels. All sorts of things. He mentions the cabin. I lose sense of reality as another wave of pain crashes into me. The girl bolts.

“I-I can’t d-do this,” I choke out. “I’m going t-to die.”

He glares at me. “The fuck you will. You’re going to have this damn baby right now and you’re going to be okay. I’m going to see if I can feel the head.”

My eyes roll back when he begins pushing his thick fingers inside me. Immediately, he jerks them out and shudders.

“What?”

“The baby is breech.”

Panicked, I let out a scream. “You have to turn the baby before it’s too late!”

Sweat pours down his temples and his eyes dart all around as if he’s coming up with a plan.

“Lie back and try to relax,” he barks.

I do as I’m told and ignore the excruciating pain as he begins working his fingers and then hand inside me. Slurping sounds can be heard as he moves it deeper inside me. He uses his free hand to push on my belly. The pain is too much.

“I need you to push right there,” he grunts, his eyes manic. “We can do this but I need your help.”

I gag as I press on my upper stomach on the right. Everything shifts inside me and I let out another scream. Another contraction rips through me as he pulls his arm back out.

I turn my head to the side and expel my dinner. The pain is too much to bear. His hands are all over my face assessing me and then he’s back

between my thighs. My energy is depleted and I feel overwhelmed. As though I truly will die on this floor. I just hope our baby lives.

“You have to stay strong, Pip,” he chokes out, clutching my knee. “Stay with me. Focus. I can’t get this baby out of you. You’re going to have to do that all on your own. Would it help to get on your knees?”

I cry until another contraction steals my breath. Tears roll down my temples. I don’t know what to do. I just want the pain gone. I want the baby out of me. I want to…

Push.

The urge is unlike any other feeling in the world.

It becomes my only thought.

Push.

I grip my knees and bear down, a guttural sound ripping from my chest. My eyes are closed but I can hear Dad praising me. The urge passes and I fall limp.

“You’re doing well,” he assures me. “Next time the pain hits, do that again.”

We don’t have to wait long.

The pain explodes through me again.

I bear down and keep my eyes on him. His eyes are looking down. When his face lights up, I gape at him in shock.

“I can see the head! We fucking did it! Baby, I can see the hair! Dark like me,” he bellows.

I start laughing or sobbing, I’m not sure which, but I’m happy. Knowing the baby is so close—that it will look like him maybe—has me more determined than ever.

Over and over again.

I push and push.

“Oh, God,” I scream. “It hurts!”

“I know, sweetheart. You’re doing so well. Just keep going.”

The next push, I feel some relief and Dad’s eyes are wide.

“Holy fuck! The head’s out. Jesus, Devon, the head’s out!”

I don’t have time to recover because another painful contraction tears through me. I bear down. Over and over until relief like I’ve never known slides out of me and into the arms of my father.

I black out.

For a moment.

But then my eyes are wide.

“It’s not crying!” I shriek. “Why isn’t it crying?!”

Dad’s face is twisted up as he panics. He holds the limp baby in his arms and I sob at seeing it.

“Fuck!” he cries out. “Cry! Why the hell isn’t he crying?!” Fat tears roll down my dad’s face.

He?

“It’s a boy?” I question, a sob caught in my throat.

He nods. “Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. What do we do?”

“I don’t know!”

He grabs our son by the ankles and turns him upside down. I’m horrified by how brutal he’s being. Then, not so gently, he spanks the infant’s small bottom. I’m about to scream at my father when I hear it.

Choked at first.

Then louder.

His lungs. They’re powerful.

“He’s crying!” I exclaim. “Oh my God, he’s crying!”

He cradles the baby in his hands and passes him to me. My arms protectively wrap around the child as I pull him to my chest. He’s perfect. Dark hair, long skinny body. Perfect.

Mine.

Oh, God, he’s mine.

I lie there crying in joy for what feels like forever. The baby is sticky and bloody pressed against me. He won’t stop crying but I take this as good news. The umbilical cord is still attached to him and somewhere inside me.

Another smaller pain ripples through me. “I think the placenta is coming out.”

Dad’s face is frantic as he does his best to give birth to the placenta. It comes out easily. I’m shivering, my teeth chattering, when Eve runs back into the house, her arms full and a backpack slung over her shoulder. She brings me a towel and I wrap it around my son.

Blackness clouds my vision and I pass out.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

reed

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

Her eyes roll back in her head and I panic. “Baby! Wake up!”

She blinks her eyes open slowly. “I’m so exhausted.”

Relief rushes through me. “Other than that, you feel okay?”

Her nod is slight.

“Go to sleep then. I’ll take care of you.”

The moment she passes out, I grab my knife and cut the umbilical cord. It hangs like a gnarly snake but I just need to clean her up. With careful movements, I scoop our son from her chest and wrap him in the towel. He kicks and squawks. I almost cry when I realize he has her nose. With a quick kiss to it, I smooth out his sticky hair and hold him up to a wide-eyed Eve.

“Can you hold him so I can take care of her?”

Trust is not something I hand over well, but she did just run at full speed to help me. She looks terrified, not evil. Her features soften and she nods. Kid isn’t much of a talker. I hand over the baby and she cradles him. My attention is back on my heart, my love, my motherfucking soul.

She’s a mess.

I fucked her and she was in goddamn labor.

I’m disgusted with myself.

And yet, I know it had to be done.

She needed to be claimed and stamped and owned.

Mine.

Fucking mine.

The moment I woke up and discovered she was gone, I flipped my shit. The papers all over the table meant that she’d found my dark secret. A

secret I worked so hard to keep from her.

She's my daughter.

The moment I held her, I knew.

I knew the moment she found out, if ever, she'd feel betrayed. But I told her. Fucking told her that I keep stuff from her if it meant keeping her heart safe. This was a secret that would destroy her. I just couldn't do it. Even when she was sick to fucking death worried over incest related problems, I couldn't tell her. This secret was worse than a little fear over birth defects. This secret had the potential to destroy her.

On autopilot, I boil some water and grab the first aid kit. Carefully, I wash Devon from head to toe. Her pussy is swollen and red. There is a small tear that I'm afraid needs to be stitched. I hate that she lies there, completely passed out, with her legs hung open. But at the same time, I need to take care of her without her moving. It takes some time but I manage to stitch her up and spread ointment over the parts of her pussy that look like they might hurt. Once she's clean and tended to, I cover her with a blanket Eve brought from the house.

My son cries and squirms. Eve seems terrified and gladly hands him back to me. I sit on the floor and lay him on a folded towel. The chilly air seems to piss him off and his screams get louder. Quickly, I wash our precious child. Everything about him is perfect. And his lungs are powerful. He reminds me of Drew by the way he hollers.

"You're a rowdy one, aren't you?" I coo as I wrap him tightly in a blanket.

His fist flies free and he suckles on it. I walk on my knees with him in my arms over to where Devon sleeps. It takes some maneuvering, but I manage to nestle him against her. His mouth opens as he searches for her breast. I cradle his tiny body in a way that soon has him latching on. His cries are silenced as he greedily sucks on her nipple. With tears in my eyes, I regard Eve with a grin.

"My family."

She smiles back. "Beautiful."

Eve lingers in the doorway of our cabin with my son wrapped tightly in her arms as I lower Devon into our bed. Once she's covered, I turn to accept my baby. It's been close to three hours since Devon passed out. I knew we had more to work with here so Eve dutifully followed behind me as I carried my love back home. I'm grateful to Eve in a way I can't explain. Without her, this would have been nearly impossible.

Once I settle my sleeping son onto the bed beside Devon, I turn to regard Eve. She lets out a squeak when I jerk her into my arms and hug her.

"Thank you."

Her body is tense but she doesn't fight against my embrace. When I pull away, she holds out her hand. "Fruit."

Smirking, I stroll over to a box with our canned goods. The girl is too tiny to carry it so I find the backpack and fill it with fruit cans. It'll be hard for her to get it back to the shack but she's fierce. I have no doubt she'll manage.

"If you see Buddy, will you bring him back?" I ask.

She nods as she shoulders the backpack.

That fucking dog bolted when I turned into an animal and brutally fucked Devon. I think I scared the shit out of him. He's yet to return.

"Come visit us," I call out to Eve. "Anytime."

Another nod.

Then she's gone.

I wake to a suckling sound. My back and neck are killing me. Sleeping in the chair beside the bed was a bad idea but I wanted to watch over my family.

And they are my family.

Devon is more than daughter and wife and friend.

She's laughter and life and love.

I'm grateful for the day that sixteen-year-old girl, Abigail, agreed to adopt out her twins. She had struggled for nearly two years with trying to care for them. Having a baby at fourteen would be hard on anyone. This girl

simply couldn't take it. Sabrina and I were thrilled because it meant we could finally be parents.

My eyes drift over to Devon as she nurses our son. Her eyes are soft as she watches in awe. He's beautiful. I love them both so fucking much.

Perfect.

With a smile on my lips, I think back to the day Abigail handed over the twins.

"Devon is the good baby," Abigail says, almost fussing over the toddler. "Sleeps well. It's that rowdy one over there you have to watch."

Tears well in her eyes and she lets out a choked sob.

Sabrina flashes me a worried look. Nothing feels real about this adoption. Not until we're at home with them will it really sink in.

"We'll take care of them," I vow, taking the young girl's hand.

"It's for the best, angel," Abigail's mom Patricia murmurs. "I can barely afford to feed the child I have, much less two more. Not after the divorce, especially."

Abigail stiffens. "I know, Ma." Then her blue eyes that sparkle like two lakes meet mine. "Can I talk to you for a second? About the babies."

Her mother stiffens but nods her approval to give us some alone time. Sabrina and Patricia start discussing feeding routines while I slip onto the front porch with Abigail.

"What's wrong?"

"Promise me you won't change your mind?"

I gape at her as if she's lost her marbles. "I swear."

She swallows before throwing her arms around me in a tight hug. I can't help but embrace the sweet, sad girl in my arms. She smells like apples and innocence. I kiss her soft blonde head because it feels right.

"What is it?"

Her words are whispered but I hear them. My heart cracks open in my chest. The secret is one too deep and dark for anyone but the two of us to know.

“It was Daddy.”

I swallow and stroke this poor teenage girl’s hair. “What was Daddy?”

She shudders and nearly collapses but I keep her from falling. “H-He used to come into my room when he’d b-been drinking too much. I didn’t want it but it happened…”

“I’m so sorry.”

She shakes her head. “I’m not. There is nothing wrong with them. They deserve to be loved. But not here…”

Her head tilts up and fire blazes in her eyes. “I need to get away. To escape. I can’t do that with them. Ma has blinders on. Daddy left us not long after I got pregnant. I lied to Ma. Said it was a boy from school. If she knew…”

“I won’t tell a soul,” I vow. That promise burns deep inside my heart.

“Thank you. They’re smart babies. Sweet and interactive. I just want them to be loved. I’m afraid I can’t give them what they deserve.”

“I’ll love them as though they are my own.”

“Thank you.”

“I think you should go to the police though and report him,” I say softly.

She pulls away and lifts her chin. “No. I don’t want anyone to ever know or to have an inkling. Please.”

With sadness in my heart and for the future of those two babies, I nod in agreement.

“I promise.”

She gives me a wide, toothy teenage grin. “Pinky promise?”

I laugh and offer her my pinky.

My heart is heavy as I remember Abigail. We’d only had the babies two weeks when I learned the teenager died of an overdose. I didn’t realize her escape meant death. It haunts me to this day.

But her secrets of how my Devon and Drew were born of incest stay locked away in my heart. Devon will never know. Never. She’s smart and

beautiful and fucking perfect. I don't want her to ever doubt that. One day, when she's ready, I'll tell her how sweet and loving her biological mother was but that's it. She'll never know that she was born of rape and incest.

"I'm so happy," Devon rasps out as our son nurses.

Her blonde hair is dirty and knotted but I've never seen her look so serene and gorgeous.

"Me too, baby."

"What should we name him?" she asks.

He loses his grip on her nipple and hollers. We both laugh as she helps him latch back on.

"He's a rowdy little thing."

Her blue eyes find mine. "Rowdy has a nice ring to it. After his uncle."

My heart swells. "I love it. Rowdy Andrew Jamison."

"Thank you."

I laugh and come to sit beside her on the edge of the bed. My fingers stroke through her messy hair before I settle my palm on our baby. "What are you thanking me for? You did all the work. You did this, Pip."

She shakes her head as tears spill out. Her lip wobbles madly. "Thank you for loving me. From day one, whenever that day was, until now. Our love has grown and morphed into something nobody else on this planet has. We're special."

Rowdy opens his mouth as his eyes fall shut. Who knew infants were so fucking adorable? I missed all of this with Drew and Devon. This moment, admiring my newborn son, is a moment I'll never forget.

"I'll get started on breakfast," I say with a sigh. "No rest for the weary."

She pats the bed. "We'd rather you stay here with us. The food can wait."

I'm exhausted and sore.

The idea of sleeping with my family is one I can't refuse.

I undress to my boxers and crawl in beside her. With my arm wrapped around them both, I fall into blissful, peaceful sleep.

I'm home.

We're finally home.

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EPILOGUE

devon

Two years later…

"Rowdy, no!" I squeal as he runs at warp speed toward the fireplace. My belly is giant and all I do is waddle these days. Thankfully, Reed is faster than the both of us. He scoops our son up and tosses him into the air.

Rowdy shrieks with glee and hugs his daddy's neck.

"We need to build a fence and lock him in it," I complain and blow a strand of hair from my sticky face. "The terrible twos are worse than terrible."

Reed turns to grin at me. He's not wearing a shirt and his muscles are bulging. My hormones, just like with my last pregnancy, are buzzing out of control. I want to put Rowdy down for a nap and climb my husband like a tree.

"You're giving me that look, Devon," Reed growls.

"What look?" I feign innocence.

"The fuck me in the ass look."

I scoff which makes Rowdy giggle. He has no idea what he's laughing about which makes Reed and I both laugh. "I do *not* want it *there*."

"Is that so? You weren't complaining when I had you on your knees buried to the hilt last night," he challenges.

My throat blazes with heat. I rush over and pluck Rowdy from his grip before taking my little monster to his crib. Thankfully, he loves his naps and his rabbit pelt blankie I made. The moment I lay him down, he snags the blanket and starts sucking on his thumb, his eyes heavy with sleepiness. When I turn around, Reed is undressing. The moment his rock-hard cock bobs out and he's completely naked, a whimper escapes me.

“You drive me crazy,” I complain.

He smirks and jerks his chin up as to call me over to him. Like the obedient wife I am, I find myself drawn to him. I toss aside the maternity dress along the way and lose my panties. His wolfish gaze devours my naked pregnant body. I love that he seems to appreciate my body’s changes. I never feel less than in his eyes.

Always more than.

Always.

“Did you bring Eve some fruit when you were out hunting?” I ask when my belly brushes against his toned abs.

I feel bad for her. She helped us when we needed her to but other than that, she doesn’t visit. Sometimes I can feel her eyes in the forest watching us but she never engages. Rowdy loves the presents she leaves for him on the porch though. She’s always making him toys.

“Yeah. I told her she needs to come see her nephew or I was going to haul her over my shoulder and force her to come anyway.” He chuckles. “She tried to shiv me.”

I wince and shake my head. “Maybe with time.”

“Maybe. She’s wild though. Don’t get your hopes up.”

“When is Atticus coming back?” I ask, my palms rubbing up over his sculpted pectorals.

His hands grip my hips. Not soft. Possessive and harsh. It reminds me that I’m his.

“He had to fly out to Seattle for something but he’ll be back next week. It’s coming along pretty nicely. We’ll work on the roof some more once he gets back.”

I grin up at him. They’ve been working on the house for two years. It’s framed—a giant monolith on the mountain side about a half mile from the wreckage site. They’ve worked hard on it but it’s taken them forever. Reed thinks in another two years we can move in. Until then, we keep filling up our tiny little cabin.

“Lie down, Daddy,” I purr as I reach down to grip his cock. It jolts in my hand. “Mommy wants to do the driving.”

His smoldering grin nearly melts me to the floor. Like the obedient husband he is, he lies back on the bed. I waddle my pregnant butt over to him and straddle his thighs. With our eyes locked, I sink down on his throbbing length. We both hiss out in pleasure. His palms roam my belly

and we both laugh when this kiddo rolls against his touch. Then, his fingers are at my breasts teasing me.

“You just going to sit there, woman, or are you going to fuck me?” he murmurs, his hips thrusting up.

I moan and lean forward resting my palms on his shoulders. Slowly, I begin rocking against him. Love, brilliant and deep and powerful, shines in his eyes. It burns me. Scalds me. Imprisons me. Suffocates me.

But it also fills me.

Fuels me.

Frees me.

His fingers are at my clit and he’s thrusting hard from beneath me. My husband is an animal through and through. Even from the bottom, he dominates and controls. With a flutter of my lashes, I give in. I lose myself in the way he owns me.

We both come with sounds that are straight from the forest. Not sounds two humans should make. His cum jets up inside of me and I clench around him with the aftershocks of my orgasm.

“Promise me it will always be like this,” I whisper.

His brown eyes are hard with feral emotions that all lead back to loving me. He grips my pinky with his and draws me closer to him. Even with my giant stomach wedged between us and his cock still deep inside, we manage to kiss.

“Pinky promise, Pip.”

And I believe him because this man will do everything in his power to make that happen.

Lie. Steal. Murder. Cheat. Destroy.

All in the name of keeping my heart safe.

I couldn’t ask for a more dedicated love.

He’s mine.

All mine.

Five months later…

I watch as Rowdy and Reed throw snowballs at each other. Rowdy has a good arm on him despite being a toddler. Ronan screams from inside, awake from his nap. I flash Reed a big smile as I go inside to tend to our little one. When I make it over to his cradle, he's kicking and trying to eat his fist. These boys are always hungry.

He stops fussing when I sing to him. They all do. All three of them love when I sing. His blue eyes are wide as I scoop him into my arms and sit on the bed. He latches onto my breast with vigor.

My babies are gorgeous.

Reed and I make beautiful children.

I wonder if the next one will be a girl. I haven't told Reed that I'm expecting again. He'll be thrilled, I'm sure. They still haven't finished the house but it won't be long. By next summer, we'll be ready to move in. Not everything is done but we can still live there. And by then, we'll have a fifth member to our growing family.

Joy overwhelms me.

Sometimes I wish Mom were here to see them. I wonder if it would unlock her from her spell. Drag her from the darkness. Reed assures me it wouldn't. That depression is an illness that isn't easily cured by cute babies. He reminds me that she had Drew and I and still stayed trapped inside her head.

Other times, I wonder about my real mom. Reed burned up the adoption papers because he said we were family bound by heart which was better than blood or laws. A weight lifted the moment the papers were incinerated. I kept the picture of my birth mother though. It amazes me how much she looks like me. When I ask about my biological father, Reed shrugs and says he doesn't know. I guess it doesn't matter. All of those moments lead to this one.

"Momma!" Rowdy cries out when they walk inside. He runs over to me and gets me wet with the cold snow.

"Hey, baby," I tell him and ruffle his dark hair. He looks so much like Reed it makes my heart stop.

Reed walks over to me and kisses the top of my head. "How are my beautiful wife and baby boy?"

"He's hungry and I'm tired." I give him a weary smile.

His gaze narrows as he lowers his eyes to my breasts that are engorged with milk. “Are you…are we…”

My smile is wide and tears prickle my eyes. “We are. Are you happy?”

Rowdy grunts as he tries to rip Buddy’s hair out. Buddy rolls over onto his back and licks our wild son in the face until he lets go.

“Devon,” Reed growls as he tenderly strokes my cheek. “You make me happy every single second of every single day. These kids. You. The damn dog. All of it is my happily ever after.”

I tilt my head up so he’ll kiss me. “Spoken like a true romantic.”

“I’ll show you romance once these kids go to sleep.”

“It’s on, big daddy,” I tell him with a saucy grin.

He nips at my bottom lip and growls. “Promise?”

“Pinky promise.”

The End

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Dear Reader,

Thank you so much for going on this *wild* adventure with me! I know sometimes my stories are way outside the box but I can't thank you enough for always seeing it to the end. Please, as you review, keep your spoilers to a minimum. I'm afraid that some folks might miss out on an unconventional, but beautiful love story, if they knew what sort of taboo element they were looking at before diving in. Once you're in though, it sort of hooks you, which is what I hope to do for future readers! I appreciate you keeping that tidbit to yourself!! Thank you so much!

I'm looking to take you all on more *wild* journeys very soon!

Sincerely,
The *Wild* One
aka K Webster

PS – You can join the spoiler group to talk about *The Wild* here.

PPS – If you spoil it, I'll send Eve with her shiv after you…
PPPS – I mean it.
PPPPS – Kidding…or am I?

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PLAYLIST

Listen on Spotify here.

“Tainted Love” by Marilyn Manson
“Oh My” by Big Wreck
“Blown Wide Open” by Big Wreck
“Wild Horses” by Bishop Briggs
“Way Down We Go” by Kaleo
“I Put A Spell On You” by Annie Lennox
“#1 Crush” by Garbage
“Fade Into You” by Mazzy Star
“Game of Survival by Ruelle
“Ain’t No Sunshine” by Bill Withers
“Time of the Season” by The Zombies
“How’s It Going To Be” by Third Eye Blind
“Run, Run, Run” by Tokio Hotel
“Black Gives Way To Blue” by Alice in Chains
“Behind Blue Eyes” by The Who
“Say Hello 2 Heaven” by Temple of the Dog
“Can’t Help Falling In Love” by Elvis Presley
“Cumbersome” by 4 Seven Mary Three
“In The Meantime” by Spacehog
“We’re In This Together” by Nine Inch Nails
“The Sound of Silence” by Simon & Garfunkel
“Lovesong” by The Cure
“Foolish Games” by Jewel
“Head Over Feet” by Alanis Morissette
“The Morning After” by Meg Myers
“Someone Like You” by Adele
“The House of the Rising Sun” by The Animals
“Take Me to Church” by Hozier
“No One’s Gonna Love You” by Band of Horses

“Ways to Go” by Grouplove
“Sail” by Awolnation
“To Be Alone” by Hozier
“Stubborn Love” by The Lumineers
“Alive” by Pearl Jam

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Rock Country (Book 1)
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This Isn't Over, Baby (Book 3)
This Isn't You, Baby (Book 4)
This is Me, Baby (Book 5)
This Isn't Fair, Baby (Book 6)
This is the End, Baby (Book 7—a novella)

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Pretty Lost Dolls (Book 2)
Pretty New Doll (Book 3)

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Bad Bad Bad
Easton

Standalone Novels:
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Love and Law
Moth to a Flame
Erased
The Road Back to Us
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Zeke's Eden
Sweet Jayne
Untimely You
Mad Sea
Whispers and the Roars
Schooled by a Senior
B-Sides and Rarities
Blue Hill Blood by Elizabeth Gray
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ABOUT AUTHOR
k webster

K Webster is the author of dozens of romance books in many different genres including contemporary romance, historical romance, paranormal romance, dark romance, romantic suspense, and erotic romance. When not spending time with her hilarious and handsome husband and two adorable children, she’s active on social media connecting with her readers.

Her other passions besides writing include reading and graphic design. K can always be found in front of her computer chasing her next idea and taking action. She looks forward to the day when she will see one of her titles on the big screen.

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